



**THE BOARD OF EDUCATION OF
SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 58 (NICOLA-SIMILKAMEEN)**

ADMINISTRATION OFFICE

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November 23, 2021

Dear parents, caregivers, students and SD58 community and families:

It has been just over one week since extreme weather and floods overwhelmed our communities in Merritt and Princeton. Over the last year we have experienced incredible hardship due to extreme weather systems impacting our region. These experiences continue to bind our communities together, and in the end, will make us stronger and more resilient. But we know that the situation is very challenging for you and SD58 staff is determined to support each family on the road to recovery—no matter how long it takes—as we continue to work together to rebuild our communities and lives from this recent devastation.

Community Updates

We have been in touch with many of you, and hope that every family has found stable and safe accommodation to shelter in until we are all able to return home. Over the past week, we have been locating displaced SD58 staff and families and coordinating access to any necessities they may have needed, including food and water, helping to secure accommodation and facilitating connections with loved ones.

Several neighbouring school districts have stepped in to offer their support to SD58 families, including the North Okanagan-Shuswap School District (SD83), Central Okanagan Public Schools (SD23) and the Kamloops-Thompson School District (SD73), which has coordinated a donation centre for SD58 families this week at their @KOOL School Building in Kamloops (see below for more details). The support of these school districts, the Ministry of Education, our union partners and the United Way has made all of our work this last week possible, and we are beyond grateful for their help.

Our staff are continuing to find ways to support SD58 families and their communities. Last week, our teams were assisting with the evacuation efforts in Merritt. This week Princeton schools and school district staff were in the community, helping to clear out mud and cleaning up students' homes. Our staff have shown incredible generosity of spirit and the humanity we all need and deserve in this crisis, and we are so grateful for all they have done and continue to do.

Yesterday, the City of Merritt released its Return Home Plan, which outlines the phased approach the municipality is taking to allow residents to return. The community entered Phase 1 today, at 12:00 PM. If you are re-entering the community as a Phase 1 resident, please note that there is still a Boil Water Notice in effect, and the municipality has asked residents to monitor their water use. As well, although Phase 1 residents may return home, the area is still on Evacuation Alert status, which means you should be prepared to evacuate if an order is issued. All information on the phases of the Return Home Plan can be found [here](#) and the latest updates from the City of Merritt, can be found [here](#).

For additional community resources and information that may be of help during this time, please see the list at the bottom of this letter.

School Updates

Success for ALL Learners ~ Today and Tomorrow

As we mentioned last week, most of our schools fortunately suffered little to no damage with the exception of Merritt Central Elementary School, which does appear to have more significant damage, although we are still learning more details. In addition, the Merritt School Board Office was also damaged. We are working on remediation plans for these facilities and will continue to provide regular updates on their status in the coming weeks.

While the Town of Princeton is not under Evacuation Order, flood-related contamination of the town's drinking water remains a concern and the situation is being closely monitored by authorities. We are in frequent communication with Interior Health regarding the re-opening of our schools in Princeton and we will continue to provide regular updates as the situation improves.

We have been working closely with both the City of Merritt and the Town of Princeton to make certain that the SD58 community is kept updated on the latest information regarding their communities.

As we've mentioned in previous communications, we are committed to ensuring each family in our community has an equitable option for their students to return to learning. With the help of the Ministry of Education, we have hired third-party consultants to guide us through the process of developing and communicating a comprehensive Return to Learning Plan. We will provide updates on the next steps in this process as soon as we have them.


SD58 has also hired a project manager to begin looking into repairs for the facilities and buildings of the school district.

To assist our SD58 community members during this extremely stressful time, we have also hired a mental health clinician to provide any support that is needed. We will share information on this in the next update.

We want to remind our community that School District 58 is here for you. We believe in the strength of our students and families and are committed to helping each and every one of you overcome this challenge with the heart and community spirit typical of our District.

Take care.

K^wuk^wscemx^w - Thank you,



Stephen McNiven
Superintendent of Schools

Resources:

[Government of British Columbia — Disaster Financial Assistance \(DFA\)](#)

[Government of British Columbia — Evacuee Registration & Assistance \(ERA\)](#)

[Government of British Columbia — Mood and Anxiety: Getting Help](#)

[Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre — Parents & Caregivers](#)

[City of Merritt — Return Home Plan](#)

[City of Merritt — Latest News](#)

[Donation Centre for Merritt/SD58 Evacuees:](#)

Kamloops Open Online Learning School (KOOL)

November 22-25, 12:00-3:00pm

1770 Springview Place, Kamloops, V2E 1X9

If you are having a difficult time accessing the donation centre, please email merrittsupport@sd73.bc.ca.