

Via email

Dear Minister Goertzen:

We hope this letter finds you and your teams safe and healthy.

Your Ministry is determining plans for the safe return to learning for the 2020-2021 school year.

On behalf of the Canadian Down Syndrome Society, I'm writing to you today to bring to your attention concerns from parents, students, and members of the Down syndrome community about plans for reopening schools across Manitoba. The closure of schools during the Covid-19 pandemic has been difficult for students, families, and educators alike. We hear from our community that students with Down syndrome experienced many challenges as systems switched to providing remote learning. These challenges included the availability of technology, the student's ability to use it, and the amount of remote contact for instruction that a student had with educators and other professionals.

We feel it is essential that the Manitoba Ministry of Education provides both plans and programs which continue to address the needs of any student with Down syndrome for the upcoming school year. Whether families choose to send their child to school or continue with remote learning, all students must have access to supports for their continued learning and development. It is essential that students with Down syndrome do not fall through the cracks during these unprecedented times. All school restart plans, for both urban and rural schools, must prioritize planning for students with Down syndrome who require specialized supports, whether in the classroom or through remote learning. Teachers and para-educational professionals must also be supported with up-to-date resources.

Recognizing that the situation is continually evolving, we urge you to avoid funding shortfalls and rather allocate adequate resources to best support student needs. Please ensure that all students with Down syndrome consistently receive every critical individualized support that they need in order to achieve success. We will continue to voice the concerns of our community and I thank you in advance for the careful planning required and your attention to the overall impact on our community.

We are available to link you and your teams with both Canadian and international subject matter experts for consultation on curriculum delivery, the development of individualized accommodations and modifications to curriculum and mental health and well-being as it relates to children and adolescents with Down syndrome.

Sincerely,

Laura LaChance