

August 2024

Dear Families,

Welcome to the new school year! We hope you and your family had a joyful summer and are ready to return to the routine of autumn with hope and optimism.

In education, September is often seen as a fresh start. It's a time for new notebooks, organizational tools, and setting goals. While we can't predict everything this school year will bring, we are committed to ensuring that your children, our students, have the opportunity to develop their strengths and engage in meaningful learning. That's exactly what we're planning for.

There are two areas we want to highlight as we begin this school year: provincial cellphone guidelines and the student information system (SIS).

### **Cellphone Guidelines**

On August 15, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning introduced cellphone guidelines to minimize distractions and support student learning and safety.

These guidelines require school divisions to update their policies to include the following conditions:

- Kindergarten to Grade 8 students are banned from using cellphones during school hours, including lunchtime and other breaks.
- Grades 9 to 12 students are banned from cellphone use during class time but may be permitted to use cellphones during lunchtime and other breaks, as well as for educational purposes when directed by classroom teachers.
- Appropriate exceptions to support student medical and diverse learning needs.
- Clear and appropriate direction for cellphone use in classrooms for school staff.

Since 2005, RETSD has had in place policies JICJ and JICJ-R—*Student Use of Student Supplied Personal Electronic Devices* that recognize the important role schools have in teaching and supporting responsible use of electronic devices. These policies were updated in March 2023 and currently align with the new provincial guidelines for Grades 9–12. However, they need to be revised to reflect the new expectations for kindergarten to Grade 8. Until then, the guidelines shared by Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning will be in effect starting September 1.

Since the announcement, RETSD has been building an understanding of these new guidelines. Principals will collaborate with staff and students to clarify them, and by the third week of September, you will receive a follow-up letter from your child's school with school-specific information. This will include details on lunchtime/break usage guidelines for Grades 9–12, steps for redirecting students not following the guidelines, and a process for requesting medical or other exemptions.

In the meantime, we encourage you to discuss these guidelines with your children and what they mean for cellphone use during the school day.

**As a reminder:**

- **Kindergarten to Grade 8: Students cannot use cellphones during school hours, including lunchtime and other breaks. We recommend that students leave their phones at home. If they do bring them to school, phones must be kept in a bag/backpack or locker and not accessed during school hours.**
- **Grades 9 to 12: Cellphones cannot be used during class time, unless directed by a teacher for educational purposes. Cellphones should be kept in a bag/backpack or locker. Students may use them during lunchtime and other breaks.**

Schools are places of learning, and RETSD's purpose is "To educate students to be inspired, skilled, responsible citizens." Teaching students to use technology responsibly is a vital part of this purpose. We are committed to preparing students for a world where handheld technology plays a significant role. Therefore, we will continue to foster the development of students' digital literacy skills, emphasizing self-regulation and positive, ethical, and responsible online behaviour. RETSD will also provide parents with education sessions on children's technology use.

**Student Information System (SIS)**

As previously shared with you, RETSD is currently changing to a new SIS. This change became necessary when our current provider announced their exit from the industry. Over the past year, we have been diligently working on the transition to PowerSchool, a modern and widely used SIS in Manitoba.

Our team has been busy for over a year to transfer data to PowerSchool. Each school's leadership team received training on PowerSchool in the spring, and it will take time for them to become fully proficient. As we shared in the spring, the previous parent portal was closed on July 31, and we plan to launch the PowerSchool parent portal this fall. It will be available for the first reporting period, and we will provide you with detailed information before it goes live. Regarding online fee payments, we anticipate that this feature in PowerSchool will be available after spring break in 2025. Until then, schools will continue to accept payments via cash or cheque.

We understand that change can bring both excitement and challenges. As we transition to this new system, we ask for your support and patience, recognizing that our previous system was in place for over a decade, and reaching a similar level of performance with PowerSchool will take time.

During this transition, it is essential for everyone in the RETSD community to approach this change with kindness, patience, and grace. These values will guide us through this process together.

As always, we ask that you reach out to your school principal with your questions. This does not only apply to the cellphone guidelines and the new SIS, but to any questions or concerns you may have. The divisional Concern Protocol can be found [here](#).

Enjoy the long weekend! We look forward to our ongoing partnership with you as we work together to prepare our students for their future.

Sincerely,



Sandra Herbst  
Superintendent/CEO