



April 6, 2020

Dear post-secondary, skills and training community members,

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented an exceptionally challenging time for every person involved in B.C.'s post-secondary, skills and training sector. I know that some of you are being directly affected by this virus or are concerned about friends and family here and around the world. I recognize that many of you are worried about paying your bills, finishing your programs, returning home and being disconnected from your communities. I understand that our daily lives have been turned upside down and want you to know that our government is doing everything we can to fight this pandemic and keep one another safe.

Everything we are doing is about protecting students, faculty and staff while also supporting the shift in delivery of B.C.'s world-class learning and training programs. This is equally true for the post-secondary system, as well as the hundreds of organizations who play a vitally important role in skills training across B.C. This is a uniquely unsettling time, but I want to assure you that your education and training goals will be met.

I want to express my gratitude for the leadership and resilience you have shown as we navigate these trying and uncertain times together. I know that some applied programming, like trades and health, may be more challenging to deliver online and I appreciate your continuous efforts to adjust and find safe ways for everyone to finish their studies.

For apprentices and trades students, I want to assure you that the Industry Training Authority is working hard to address your unique needs by providing creative pathways to support your completion.

For Indigenous teachers and learners, we recognize that you are facing urgent and unique challenges. We remain committed to working with Indigenous communities and institutions to ensure that training and learning is flexible and responsive.

For international students who are not able to return home and be with loved ones, I recognize that you must feel especially isolated. Please know that our government will continue to do our best to support you as much as possible.

For those who are continuing to deliver core services, I applaud all that you are doing to keep students and staff safe and healthy in the midst of an evolving situation. You worked around the clock to quickly transition to online or alternative delivery methods, and I am confident your

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swift actions helped reduce the risk for the hundreds of thousands of students, faculty and staff in every corner of the province. Whether it is supporting students, providing housing or food services, or keeping the lights on and the buildings clean – you are at the frontline of B.C.'s post-secondary system. Please know that I see you for the heroes that you are.

I want to thank all of you who are stepping up in innovative ways to support the provincial health and emergency management response. Namely producing the much-needed supplies and research to respond to COVID-19. Your efforts are saving lives.

As Premier John Horgan, Minister of Health Adrian Dix and Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry have been saying, no one is in this alone. We are going to get through this by paddling together. My ministry and the public service are working hard to ensure that you have the latest information available from provincial and federal health officials.

Our government continues to mobilize resources to better support students. We moved quickly to suspend payments on student loans, we are increasing emergency financial aid for students at every public post-secondary institution in the province, including Indigenous students, and will continue to find practical ways to support the post-secondary, skills and training sector.

We are asking everyone to do all they can to support our efforts in breaking the chain of transmission and flattening the outbreak curve. We continue to put new tools in place to support people in B.C. during this challenging time, and people can now download a self-assessment app for their phones at: <https://bc.thrive.health/>.

I also want to remind you that for non-health related information, including financial, child care and education supports, travel, transportation and essential service information, visit: www.gov.bc.ca/covid-19 or call 1 888 COVID19 (1 888 268-4319) between 7:30 a.m. and 8 p.m., seven days a week. For the latest medical updates, including case counts, prevention, risks and testing, visit: <http://www.bccdc.ca/> or follow @CDCofBC. For provincial health officer orders, notices and guidance, visit: www.gov.bc.ca/phoguidance. We encourage you to distribute this message within your community.

Under normal circumstances, B.C.'s post-secondary, skills and training sector excels at tackling some of the biggest social, economic and environmental challenges. While this may be one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century, I know in my heart that we will get through this together.

T'ooyaksim' N'iisim',



Honourable Melanie Mark
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