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3-year-old Jake Cote was last seen in Bas-Saint-Laurent, Que.

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Montreal schools reopen amid excitement, concern and caution



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Third COVID-19 school year begins

Students in Montreal headed back to class Tuesday amid excitement and concern.

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It's the first day of class for Montreal's English schools and it's shaping up to be a challenging year due to the COVID-19 virus.

Back-to-school concerns in Quebec

Quebec Education Minister Jean-François Roberge addresses concerns as kids head back to school with the pandemic still in full swing.

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MONTREAL – Montreal students headed back to class Tuesday, and amid all the usual back-to-school excitement, there was also concern for what could be another challenging year ahead.

Many elementary and high school students are ready for school, as are their parents.

"She didn't go to school last year, she was homeschooled," said one parent. "It's been quite a while since she's been in the classroom, so we're very excited."

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"Having meetings with their friends online? When we were young we never had anything like that," said another.

With the rise of the COVID-19 Delta variant, however, some wonder if the education ministry's guidelines will be enough to keep students and staff safe.

This year's measures are more relaxed than last year', with class bubbles and hybrid learning eliminated and the school bus system back to normal.

Students will still need to wear masks in class, which is a relief to some teachers.

"It's perfect," said St. Monica Elementary School teacher Noah Trister. "We want to keep everyone safe so having the mask in class is an added feature of safety."

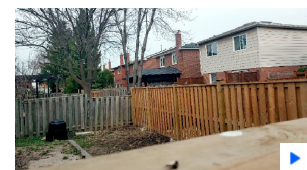
Education Minister Jean-Francois Roberge said the protocols that are in place are enough to keep everyone safe.

"I follow the recommendations of the experts," he said. "I think we can have full confidence in the health-care authorities."

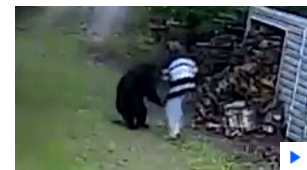
Some schools have gone further to beef up security.

"Inside, try to avoid different classes from mingling together," said English Montreal School Board Chair Joe Ortona. "Of course, outside it's a different ballgame."

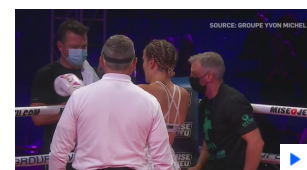
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Students line up on the first day of school in Montreal, Tuesday, August 31, 2021, as the COVID-19 pandemic continues in Canada and around the world. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Graham Hughes

At Saint-Anthony Elementary School in Pierrefonds, management is trying to separate groups of kids on the playground.

"Every grade level from K4 up to Grade 6 has a certain area of the yard where they're going to be able to go every day and that's their spot," said principal Nick Laframboise.

Roberge said so far the COVID-19 vaccine won't be mandated for teachers, and that they won't have to get tested on a regular basis, but that those protocols could change if the case counts continue to rise in the coming months.

"If we have to put forth some adjustments to make sure our schools are safe, we will," he said, affirming his intention to keep schools open.

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A young girl reacts for the camera as she arrives for the first day of school in Montreal, Tuesday, August 31, 2021, as the COVID-19 pandemic continues in Canada and around the world. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Graham Hughes

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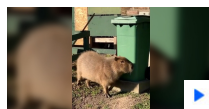
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