

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

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Questions? Email communications@hwdsb.on.ca

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GENERAL

Why are schools closed and for how long?

All Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board schools, programs and sites were closed to students on March 14, 2020 due to the COVID-19 response. Premier Doug Ford has announced an extension beyond April 5, closing schools to students until May 4, 2020.

The Ministry of Education statement released on March 31, 2020, said: “Public schools will remain closed to teachers until Friday, May 1, 2020, and to students until Monday, May 4, 2020. As these dates come closer, this decision will be re-evaluated based on public health advice. The closure may be extended if necessary to protect the health and safety of students, families and staff.”

What is cancelled or closed at HWDSB?

The following direction from the Ministry of Education and Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board applies as of Saturday, March 14, 2020. :

- All elementary and secondary schools, Education Centre, childcare centres in schools, EarlyON Child and Family Centres and all other off-site locations connected with HWDSB are closed.
- All camps, Community Use/Rentals, and Before- and After-School programs are cancelled.
- Excursions, co-op placements, School Council and Home & School Association meetings, mental health treatment programs, school events, and athletics, including OFSSA, are cancelled.

Does this include Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) Assessments?

EQAO assessments are cancelled for the 2019-20 school year, including the graduation requirement for the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test for students graduating in the 2019-20 school year. In addition, students poised to graduate will continue on this path, regardless of the provincial COVID-19 response.

LEARNING

Will learning for students continue?

The Ministry of Education has launched [Learn at Home](#), a new online portal that provides resources for families so that students can continue learning while schools are closed. HWDSB continues to review many additional online resources that support the Learn at Home initiative. Our [Student Learning Resource](#) page covers a range of grades and subjects that may be helpful for students and parents during this time. It is important to note that these online resources are not mandatory or graded and are meant for families to use as resources to support independent learning while students are at home.

Will my child's teacher reach out?

School teams are working with each other, establishing work-from-home spaces, identifying technology capacity and most importantly, reaching out to their students and families.

By April 3, students and families can expect to hear from a school staff member in order to gather an inventory of students and families that may not have access to a digital device and the internet. If you have yet to hear from your child's teacher and wish to share concerns related to access to technology, please reach out in one of the following ways:

- the contact form on your school website (see [elementary and secondary school listings](#))
- email HWDSB at info@hwdsb.on.ca
- call us at 905-527-5092 and leave your contact information on the voicemail

Beginning on Monday, April 6, school staff will begin providing learning opportunities for students. Watch for emails, newsletters, phone calls, and/or social media feeds.

Communication with our families will likely look different across HWDSB, depending on the grade and the practices already established for teacher to student and/or teacher to parent communication. Families are welcome to reach out to educators by email.

What is the plan for distance learning at HWDSB?

Distance Learning Phase 1

Self-directed learning opportunities for students during the Ministerial Order (to April 6) is being referred to as Phase 1 of learning supports. Teachers are not collecting or assessing student work during this time. As such, students are not expected to complete any work, assessments or evaluations. This being said, it is always a good idea for students to practice their skills and what they've learned.

Ministry of Education supports are available online at [Learn at Home](#), a new online portal that provides resources for families so that students can continue learning while schools are closed.

In addition, HWDSB has also listed resources on our [Student Learning Resource](#) page that covers a range of grades and subjects that may be helpful for students and parents during this time. It is important to note that these online resources are not mandatory or graded and are meant for families to use as resources to support independent learning while students are at home.

The ministry has said that these resources do not replace what students have been learning at school, but are intended to help mitigate learning loss during the COVID-19 shutdown period. The Ministry has indicated that phase two of Learn at Home, begins on Monday, April 6.

Distance Learning Phase 2

We have received more direction about the Ministry's guidelines for continuation of learning. In broad strokes, this entails collaboration with all stakeholders, reconnecting with students and staff training and use of board online platforms. Additional guidelines include:

- Teacher-led learning by grade groupings
- Suggested hours of work per week by division (K-3, 4-6, 7-8, 9-12)
 - **Kindergarten-Grade 3:** Five hours of work per student/week (focus on literacy and math)
 - **Grades 4-6:** Five hours of work per student/week (focus on literacy, math, science and social studies)
 - **Grades 7-8:** Ten hours of work per student/week (focus on math, literacy, science and social studies)
 - **Grades 9-12:** Three hours of work per course per week for semestered students; 1.5 hours of work per course per week for non-semestered students (focus on achieving credits/completion/graduation)
- All teachers will provide final marks and boards will issue report cards
- Mid-year report cards are only for students graduating from high school

Will my child graduate from high school?

For many students and parents, particularly in Grade 12, there is concern about graduating high school. A priority is being placed on students scheduled to graduate this year and any student on track to graduate will be supported to graduate. The Minister of Education has been clear that graduating students should not have their graduation or progression impacted by the developments surrounding

the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ministry of Education is working in close cooperation with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities and sector stakeholders to ensure no student's graduation or transition to post-secondary is jeopardized as a result of the school closure period.

Will eLearning courses continue?

eLearning courses continue to be available to students, but no evaluation of student learning is occurring. They will be fully available on April 6th.

Will mid-term reports be postponed?

Only students graduating from high school will receive mid-year report cards. The requirement to issue mid-year report cards for non-graduating secondary students is suspended for this school year.

Will assignments be postponed?

For elementary students, teachers will monitor student learning to help students identify their strengths and weaknesses and target areas that need work, while allowing for the teacher to address problems immediately. Teachers will provide feedback to their students on their progress.

Secondary students will be assigned learning tasks, projects and culminating activities that will be marked by their teachers. Teachers will communicate results of these marked assignments to students. Results will be used by teachers to inform students' final course marks.

My current mark is low and I was looking to improve it before the mid-term marks are in. Will this closure impact my marks?

Please discuss this with your teacher when you return.

Will this impact college and university applications?

We do not believe there will be an impact, however, it's best that you check with your college or university. The Ministry has informed boards that discussions are being held with colleges and universities about the adaptations required to support the admission process for students applying for post-secondary education, and further information will be provided.

Will Co-op placements continue during this time?

Cooperative Education is a highly immersive form of experiential learning and plays a key role in programs such as Specialist High Skills Majors (SHSM) and the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP).

For students who are enrolled in Cooperative Education courses which involve a classroom component and a community placement component, their in-person community placements will need to be suspended. These students can work with their co-op teachers to modify their co-op Learning Plans so that they may work through the curriculum expectations. Where feasible, these learners should be provided with opportunities to connect virtually with industry partners on career exploration activities, and experiential learning opportunities.

The SHSM program has an override request process already in place. Graduating students in the SHSM program unable to complete their SHSM requirements due to extenuating circumstances, including the impacts from COVID-19, will be supported through the override request process.

We are working with our community partners to create virtual co-ops and other experiential learning opportunities.

Should students in Dual Credit programs attend their college/university classes?

No. Students in Dual Credit programs will not attend their college/university classes.

Will the school year be extended into the summer months?

We have not received this direction from the Ministry of Education. The decision to extend the school year would be made by them. It's too early to determine if this will be necessary.

How will I complete my 40 hours of community volunteer time in order to graduate?

The graduation requirement to complete 40 hours of community involvement is suspended for this school year. Community involvement hours that have been completed will be reported on the report cards of graduating students. Graduating students are encouraged to complete their hours wherever possible, where the health and safety of the student can be assured.

Can families use school playgrounds and equipment?

Access to all school buildings is completely restricted at this time. We know that school yards are important green spaces in many communities, however, school yards are closed. Play structures are not disinfected and, as a result, may not be a safe place for children to play.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

What supports exist for HWDSB students who are struggling?

This is a challenging and stressful time for students and families across our community. To help, HWDSB has developed a tip sheet for [Supporting child and youth mental well-being during COVID-19](#). In addition, we have created a [Student Mental Health Supports postcard](#) that summarizes mental health supports in case of crisis, urgent or non-urgent incidents. Please share this information with those who can benefit from it.

The [HWDSB Helps app](#) continues to be active so that students or families can anonymously share non-urgent concerns through that service, which will share it with staff who can help. Also, School Mental Health Ontario has produced resources for [How to support student mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

- If this is a crisis, call 911 or visit your local hospital emergency room.
- If this urgent, contact Kids Help Phone at 1-800-668-6868 or kidshelpphone.ca; or, COAST Hamilton at 905-972-8338 or coasthamilton.ca.
- If this is not urgent, please use the HWDSB Helps app available by text to 905-963-0066, the iOS and Android app or web chat at www.hwdsb.on.ca/wehelp.

If you are an HWDSB staff member seeking support, please contact our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Lifeworks. Find more details are on the [myHOME staff portal](#).

What community supports are available?

Here are a few supports that are available to families in the Hamilton area.

- [City of Hamilton financial supports](#)
- [Hamilton Food Share](#) – for food banks
- To learn about Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan and how the government is prepared to help Canadians who are facing financial hardship, visit the [Government of Canada website](#).

Hamilton Foundation for Student Success remains committed to supporting HWDSB students in need during the COVID-19 pandemic. To learn more or to make a donation to the Foundation's COVID-10 Relief Fund, please visit www.hamiltonfoundationforstudentsuccess.com.

You may also consider donating to the [United Way of Halton and Hamilton](#) or accessing their supports.

OTHER IMPACTS

How can I stay informed?

Be on alert. Fraud and crime by email or electronic means remain a real threat during these challenging times. Heightened vigilance is required. Reliable sources of information include:

- [City of Hamilton](#)
- [Province of Ontario](#)
- [Government of Canada](#)

For HWDSB updates during the closure, please visit the HWDSB website at www.hwdsb.on.ca and follow HWDSB on social media (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram). We will also communicate with families through our SchoolMessenger service (phone calls, emails and SMS messages).

What is the status of Identification, Placement, and Review Committees (IPRCs)?

IPRCs will begin via teleconference starting April 13. Specific instructions will be coming from Special Education Support Services shortly.

Can I or my child enter the school to retrieve an item?

No. For your safety, schools are closed to the public at this time. If it is an emergency, please email the school principal or info@hwdsb.on.ca. You will have access to schools after the closure period has ended.

Has HWDSB cancelled all trips and school events?

HWDSB has not yet made a decision on whether it is necessary to cancel all field trips, athletic banquets, semi-formals and proms for the remainder of the school year. However, this may be possible. The decision to cancel graduations and commencements has also been deferred.

Will board committees that meet in the evenings be held during this time?

Look for updates to be provided on our [website](#). Board Committee meetings will continue electronically, and audio tapings of the meetings will be available on our website the next morning. Board of Trustee meetings will continue to be available via live-stream on our [YouTube channel](#).

Will parent-teacher interviews be scheduled during this time?

No, these will be cancelled.

Will my child's attendance record be affected?

The school closure will not affect your child's attendance record. During the two-week shut down, student absences will be reported as general absence, also known as a G-Day.

Will the schools be cleaned between March 14 and May 4?

All HWDSB schools received a regular cleaning after the end of the school day on March 13. Since then, caretaking and trades staff are visiting the sites as required to ensure that they remain in a state of good repair and available for students on May 4. Caretaking staff conducted additional cleaning during the week of March 30, which focused on enhanced cleaning of high-touch surfaces, desktops, washrooms and food prep areas. HWDSB takes its lead from Hamilton Public Health Services and should the public health department advise the school board to take any additional precautions, we will implement them immediately.

Will families be notified when there is a confirmed case of Coronavirus (COVID-19) within the school community?

HWDSB follows the lead of Hamilton Public Health Services (PHS) in all matters related to COVID-19. In situations where a person has tested positive for COVID-19, PHS is responsible for notifying the public. If it is deemed necessary, PHS will share information with the school community, via the principal, and will also actively follow-up directly with those individuals who may have been exposed to COVID-19.

Will Student Discipline Hearings continue?

No. All student discipline hearings will be rescheduled when schools reopen after April 5, 2020.

Will Adult and Continuing Education classes and programs continue?

As of March 23, 2020, Adult Day School for Credit and Hybrid for credit courses are continuing.

Will International Language programs continue?

No. All International Language programs will be closed from March 14 to April 5, 2020.

Can I contact my child's Vice-Principal, Principal or Superintendent during the closure?

Yes. While schools are closed, Vice Principals, Principals and Superintendents will still be available by phone or email should you have any urgent questions or concerns. You can also expect educators to reach out to your child during this period, with a focus on access to technology and the internet.

Will external vendor payments continue to be processed during this time?



HWDSB is committed to supporting our vendors through prompt payments. Effective March 16, 2020, vendor payments will continue to be processed, but with some limitations.