

HWDSB

October 27, 2020

Dear families,

At a recent joint public health-school board meeting, Hamilton's Chief Medical Officer Dr. Elizabeth Richardson said: *"Nothing has changed about the COVID-19 virus. Nothing has changed about how it is transmitted or what can make a difference to prevent it. The only thing that has changed that has caused the numbers to increase is people's behaviour. Unfortunately, some are not following public health measures and that's driving the numbers up."*

Dr. Richardson's message is important to share as we are seeing COVID-19 cases increase in our community. We must stay vigilant with our use of enhanced public health measures so that we can keep schools safe.

Please see the following highlights from the latest [HWDSB COVID-19 Update](#) for Trustees:

Mental Health

COVID-19 continues to weigh heavily on our mental health. Student mental health and well-being supports, including access to social workers, are available. Learn more about treatment groups and other resources at www.hwdsb.on.ca/mentalhealth

Thoughtexchange Update

We plan to use Thoughtexchange often this year, to regularly check-in with students and families, whether attending in-person or remote programs. Our efforts will track emerging themes and inform the need for potential adjustments to plans throughout the school year. We expect that [Thoughtexchange results](#) from the October check-in on school reopening will be posted this week.

Enhanced Public Health Measures

Daily Screening

Screening for COVID-19 symptoms and staying home if ill remain key strategies to reduce the risk and potential spread of COVID-19. Families must screen their children for COVID-19 every day before going to school/childcare.

Confirmed case communication

Parents and guardians will receive timely communication when there is a confirmed case associated with your child's school. When there is a confirmed case, expect to hear terms like [close or casual contacts](#). You may also be asked to have your child self-isolate; learn [How to Self-Isolate](#).

Practices are being established and shared about [Communications to expect after a confirmed case of COVID-19](#). Some include:

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- Students may be held back from dismissal should public health notify us about a confirmed case within this timeframe. Students will not be allowed to ride the school bus.
- A school administrator will personally notify families of a close contact child. A School Messenger phone alert may be used if the call volume is more than one class and/or if the contact is late in the evening, in which case, a School Messenger call will be made.
- Notification to the broader school community will be done through School Messenger as late as 9:30 p.m. or as early at 6:45 a.m. with a letter posted on the school website.
- Multiple cases in a school does not always mean a [school outbreak](#). Direction is provided by Hamilton Public Health Services in declaring an outbreak at a specific school location.
- Private information or identifiers including grade, gender, names of confirmed cases will not be shared.

Halloween in HWDSB

The City of Hamilton shared information about how to [Celebrate Halloween in Hamilton](#). In our schools, students may wear costumes as they did in past years (e.g., no weapons, no costume masks that might impede vision, no inappropriate images, etc.). Students choosing to wear a costume should arrive at school wearing the costume and keep the costume on all day.

Student costumes must be able to accommodate a face covering as per COVID-19 requirements. Safe practices including physical distancing and hand hygiene will be maintained. We will not offer costume parades or in-person assemblies. There will be no sharing or distributing food or drink.

Learning at HWDSB

Elementary Staff Reorganization

For impacted students in elementary school, a printed letter would have been provided to your child, starting October 27, if a change was made to your child's class or educator. Classes that have been reorganized will all start on Tuesday, November 3 (remote and in-person).

Remote Learning/In-Person Transition

Approximately 300 more students have chosen to switch from in-person to remote learning. Families can expect contact with their remote educator on Tuesday, November 3. A full day of instruction will start November 4.

The January and March transition periods will likely not result in school reorganizations as they did this fall. While this will result in less disruption it will also mean less flexibility. Fulfilling requests at these transition points will be based on the availability space and/or funding at the time.

Hamilton-Wentworth Student Transportation Services (HWSTS)

Due to the November 3 transition between in-person and remote learning, families of students eligible for transportation are being asked if they are opting in or out of this transportation. Families only need to indicate their choice if they want to change their past decision.

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School Council Start-up Session (Virtual)

The Parent Involvement Committee invites School Council members and administrators to a virtual session on Wednesday, November 4, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. RSVP to communications@hwdsb.on.ca and a link to the virtual meeting will be shared using the MS Teams platform. School Council operations within COVID-19 restrictions will be outlined.

Technology

We are working to understand the need for devices and internet support among elementary students attending in person in case we need to adopt remote learning due to public health direction.

We ask any student who was loaned an HWDSB device during the school closure in spring 2020, and who is now learning in person, to return the device to their school.

Stay well and be safe,



Manny Figueiredo
Director of Education