

HWDSB

November 24, 2020

Dear families,

The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting all of us. For some, the impact is being felt more than others. As we move through these months, I want to thank you for continuing to trust Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) with the responsibility of educating your child/ren in the safest possible environment.

School staff are committed to working through any challenges that will meet the needs of your family during this difficult time. We continue to adapt to new information from the province, as well as from our local public health services. As we adjust our plans, we remain focused on keeping schools open to ensure that your child/ren's development continues to progress as expected.

Enhanced public health measures

As you are aware, Hamilton moved into the Red Category to adjust and tighten public health measures and slow the spread of COVID-19. This is part of the provincial [COVID-19 response framework](#). The Red Category sets out broader-scale measures and restrictions to control transmission as schools remain open.

Thank you for your continued efforts as we adhere to the public health measures. Screening for COVID-19 symptoms and staying home if sick is key to minimizing the risk of spread in school. Wearing a mask, washing hands, and keeping physically distant are also important measures.

COVID-19 case management

Communication of positive COVID-19 cases continues as the virus is present in our community. In a confirmed case of COVID-19, parents and guardians should be confident that a school representative or a public health nurse will contact you. If you have not been contacted, then you have not been exposed to the confirmed case. Learn more about [close and casual contacts](#).

Mental health and well-being support

COVID-19 is weighing on our individual and collective mental health. School-based mental health and well-being representatives are engaged in Emotion Coaching with a focus on the application during a pandemic. We are also offering [mental health and well-being webinars for parents and caregivers](#) with the next sessions on November 25, December 2 and 9.

Elementary remote readiness

Recently, the Minister of Education announced that there would not be an extended holiday break. At HWDSB, we continue to be prepared in the event the Ministry of Education asks school boards to shift to full remote learning if directed by provincial or local public health authorities. Our priority is to continue learning in all situations. In order to achieve this, a project team is in place to support students and staff needs, such as the deployment of technology.

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Elementary school transitions

This fall, we experienced a significant and difficult reorganization to balance class sizes and accommodate parent choice for either in-person or remote learning. We greatly appreciate everyone's patience and understanding during this complex process.

Based on this experience, and to minimize the need for any further disruptions to existing classes, we will use the month of January to gather information from families and plan for a second transition date in late February, following the end of Term 1 and the distribution of report cards. Communication about this revised process, including dates and supports for accessing the Parent Portal, will begin in early December.

As we have indicated throughout the start of the school year, every effort will be made to accommodate preferences for either remote or in-person attendance. We have learned together that this is not always a simple choice and may not align with a specific transition date. As such, we want to emphasize that parents and guardians should contact their child's principal to discuss extraordinary circumstances at any time. Requests are reviewed regularly with superintendents of student achievement and where possible, adjustments are made.

At all times, student safety remains the top priority. Ensuring that classrooms are set-up with 1 metre distancing adds an additional challenge to accommodate requests for in-person attendance. This may require the addition of teaching staff and/or relocating classes to a different space within a school. Class sizes for remote learning are also being closely monitored and may also require the addition of staff. The ongoing balancing of class sizes and physical distancing requirements is contingent on funding from Board reserves as well as any additional funding provided by the Ministry of Education.

Secondary school update

The third rotation, which had period three as the in-person course for a four-period schools and three/four for a five-period schools, will end on December 10. As in the previous rotation dates, there are 21 instructional days with in-person course. The next rotation will start on December 11. A letter about [secondary school exams and graduation requirements](#) was also shared with our community.

Transportation

Hamilton-Wentworth Student Transportation Services continues to review all strategies to increase the number of drivers and/or decrease the number of routes. It is hopeful that the rotating cancellations will no longer be required by mid-December. HWDSB conducted a study to offer mid-day bus runs for secondary students. As a result of the data collected, the bus driver shortage and the Board's significant budget challenges, we are not able to offer mid-day transportation.

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Professional Activity Day – November 27

November 27 is a Professional Activity day dedicated to staff professional learning. There will be no classes on this day for all students, both in school and remote. Elementary educators will dedicate half of the day to communicate virtually with parents, guardians, and caregivers regarding student progress. A reminder that educators are available throughout the school year to discuss student learning, achievement and well-being. If you would like to connect with your child's teacher, please contact the school to make these arrangements.

School Fundraising

Considering the continued restrictions in the City of Hamilton and impact of the enhanced public health measures in our schools, we have extended our procedure to not offer School Council led fundraising until January 2021. School Councils can direct parents to make personal contributions to charities such as the [Hamilton Foundation for Student Success](#) or the [United Way of Halton & Hamilton](#), for example, without coordinating or leading the fundraising effort at the school.

Stay well and be safe,



Manny Figueiredo
Director of Education