

March 11, 2022

Nancy Naylor
Deputy Minister of Education

Re: Lifting of Health and Safety Measures in Schools

Dear Nancy,

On March 9, 2022, directors of education received a memo titled *Ministry of Education Update: Lifting of Health and Safety Measures in Schools*.

This memo provided school boards with an update on key health and safety measures for the remainder of the 2021-22 school year that includes lifting the vaccine disclosure policy, masking, cohorting and distancing, as well as on-site screening requirements. The memo states that “schools are encouraged to immediately move toward normal conditions within all school settings.”

At HWDSB, the Board of Trustees have passed motions to support a purposeful, phased approach as we move toward normal conditions as outlined in the memo. We appreciate the need to return to a more normal learning experience for students and the language used in the Ministry memo that directs schools to “move toward” normal conditions.

While we are no longer required to have masks, cohorting or distancing in schools effective March 21, 2022, Trustees maintained the motion for mask requirements for students in Kindergarten to Grade 3, and passed a motion that students in grades 4-12, as well as staff, be required to wear masks until April 15, 2022.

We expect cohorting, on-site screening requirements and outdoor masking requirements will cease immediately starting March 21, per provincial direction. We also expect that schools will be taking time to implement changes in practice in thoughtful ways so that students experience gradual changes in learning environments starting March 21st.

Trustees feel a gradual phased approach to the return to “normal” is critical for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it supports student, family and staff well-being through a time of significant change. Incremental lifting of safety measures allows everyone to adjust and adapt to our return to normal. We continue to provide exemptions and accommodations where needed.

Second, we have significant concerns around the plan for lifting most of the key pandemic-related health and safety requirements immediately following March break. We have learned from prior experiences that COVID-19 case rates increase following holidays where increased social interactions and travel occur. We are still actively working through staffing shortages and increased absences for staff and students, and would like to mitigate challenges relating to the provincial health and safety changes.

HWDSB

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Further, we also feel that by maintaining indoor masking requirements for HWDSB for just a few additional weeks, we are supporting a safer transition through the provincial changes for our medically vulnerable students and staff.

Trustees understand and respect that it is the Ministry of Education's role to establish additional policies and guidelines with respect to the conduct of persons in school. We ask for support for our plan to follow the Ministry memo and "immediately move towards normal conditions within all school settings" using a strategic, phased approach as outlined above.

Sincerely,



Dawn Danko
Chair of the Board

CC. Minister Lecce, Minister of Education