



Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board
Believing, Achieving, Serving

February 3, 2021

Dear Parents & Guardians,

We want to thank you for your understanding and patience throughout these unprecedented times. We recognize that the pandemic has caused difficulties and challenges for you, your children and indeed our entire community. We want to as well express our deep appreciation to our staff who continue to work tirelessly in the best interest of our students and the good of publicly funded Catholic education.

Earlier today, we received the good news that our elementary and secondary students will return to in-person learning on **Monday, February 8, 2021**. The announcement was made by the Provincial Government in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health and other health experts as community levels of COVID-19 transmission continue to decrease and additional health and safety measures are implemented to keep students safe.

Additional Health & Safety Measures

For students that are currently part of face-to-face instruction, schools will open on February 8, 2021 with new health and safety measures to support the return to in-person learning. These new measures, which came into effect on January 25, 2021, include:

- Mandatory outdoor masking for students where physical distancing cannot be maintained;
- Enhanced COVID-19 screening; and,
- Targeted asymptomatic testing.

Mandatory masks

Currently non-medical or cloth masks are mandatory indoors for all students of the HWCDSB, K-Grade 12, including in hallways and during classes, as well as on the school bus. The new health & safety protocols will require students to now wear a mask outdoors for activities where physical distancing is not possible. Parents may want to consider sending their child with multiple masks so that masks can be replaced when they become wet during outdoor use. Please see Public Health Ontario's [COVID-19 cold weather tips for schools](#).

COVID-19 self-screening

All students, with the help of their parents when necessary, are expected to complete the [COVID-19 school screening](#) every day. With the enhanced health and safety guidelines, schools will now be required to validate daily self-screening of all school staff, secondary students and visitors prior to or upon arrival to school to ensure that all individuals entering the school building have completed and passed their daily COVID-19 self-screening. If individuals do not pass the screening, they are to stay home. Any student, staff or visitor that has not completed the self-screening will be required to complete self-screening prior to entry. Secondary students will be required to validate that they have completed their daily self-screening during class attendance.

Information on the validation process will be forthcoming. Any student, staff or visitor that does not pass the on-site screening procedures will be asked to return home and self-isolate until they meet the criteria for return. It is important that parents/guardians complete the [attestation form](#) upon their child's return to in-person learning following illness or self-isolation.

Targeted asymptomatic testing

The government has indicated that it will expand targeted asymptomatic testing for students and staff in schools with high case counts and outbreaks. This testing would be on a voluntary basis. Hamilton Public Health Services (HPHS) is currently developing a plan for Hamilton schools and details will be shared at a later date.

Physical Distancing

Despite these numerous prevention measures to keep our students and staff safe from COVID-19, we know that close contact is the highest risk factor for COVID-19 transmission. We urge parents and guardians to remind their children about the need to follow physical distancing guidelines and to **refrain from congregating in groups before and after school**.

Student Transportation

Student transportation services will resume for eligible students on Monday, February 8, 2021. Please be reminded that masks must be worn on the bus and for case management and contact tracing purposes, students must adhere to bus seating plans.

Child Care / Before and After Care

Child care and before-and-after school care will resume for school-aged children on Monday, February 8, 2021, in alignment with the return to in-person learning, and with enhanced health and safety guidelines.

Switching between elementary learning models

The next opportunity for changing your child's model of learning – from face-to-face learning to virtual learning or from virtual learning to face-to-face learning – will take place on Monday, February 22, 2021. A survey will be sent to parents this coming Friday, February 5 with a response date of Monday, February 8, 2021. Only those parents who wish to make a change to the current learning model need reply to this survey. This is the final opportunity for moving between learning models.

Secondary hybrid model of learning

Secondary students will return to a hybrid model of learning which features a blended class of in-person and remote learners. The hybrid model will not only allow students to better maintain their current timetable but ensures that students remain connected with a classroom teacher and other support staff at their home school. The model also gives students who wish to learn in a fully remote manner access to a greater selection of elective courses to fit their pathway planning. The hybrid model will be implemented for semester 2 beginning on Thursday, February 4, 2021.

Supporting student mental health

New research shows that COVID-19 has had a significant effect on young people's mental health, due to social isolation and uncertainty around the pandemic. The HWCDSB remains committed

to enhancing and protecting student mental health as we return to school. This is the foundation for student success during this challenging time. Students can only feel ready to engage and learn when they feel mentally well and are warmly welcomed back to class. Above all, staff and students need to feel safe, confident, included and cared for, whether they attend school in-person or remotely. A number of resources to support students and families are available on the [HWCDSB website](#).

Hamilton Public Health Services and the Lynwood Charlton Centre have also teamed up to create a [resource webpage](#) to support students' mental health during COVID-19. The website includes information on:

- recognizing the signs of a mental health concern;
- mental health services;
- substance use services and resources;
- supporting child and youth mental health during COVID-19, including a youth-focused section with ways that youth can help to support their own mental health.

For a list of local mental health and addictions services during COVID-19 for children and youth, visit www.hamilton.ca/CYmentalhealth.

Other resources for educators, parents and families, and students are available on the School Mental Health Ontario (SMHO) website:

- [Student COVID-19 Resources](#)
- [Parent and Families COVID-19 Resources](#)

SMHO has also partnered with Jack.org and Kids Help Phone to create an [online hub of COVID-19 youth-focused mental health resources](#) to help students take care of themselves and others.

Black History Month

This month, we join with Canadians across the country to celebrate, acknowledge and honour the legacy of Black Canadians, past and present. The focus of this year's Black History Month celebration is "Allyship," a process which encourages us to speak less and to listen more. In doing so, we grow, and we learn. As Mary McLeod Bethune, the American civil rights activist, recognized, "We have a powerful potential in our youth, and we must have the courage to change old ideas and practices so that we may direct their power toward good ends."

This year we have planned a number of online activities geared to students of different ages/grades, including a live read-aloud with Black Canadian author Bonnie Farmer, a live dance event with former Cathedral student Josh Taylor, a poetry slam and writing workshop featuring local poet Nadine Williams, and a Black History poster contest for students in all grades. Learn more about these different events on the Board website (www.hwcdsb.ca) or from your child's school.

Our Lenten journey

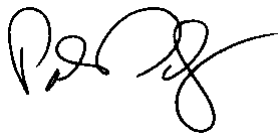
Although our churches remain closed, the Diocese of Hamilton is preparing an Ash Wednesday program that can be celebrated at home with the Gospel proclamation and a reflection by His Excellency, Bishop Crosby. Unfortunately, ashes will not be distributed in person but parents may

bless their children by tracing the Sign of the Cross on their foreheads, marking the beginning of the annual Lenten journey. Visit the [Diocese of Hamilton website](#) for more information.

Safe return

As we prepare to return to our physical classrooms, we would like to take this opportunity to thank our teachers, system and school leaders, support staff, parents and guardians, who have kept the flame burning bright during this remote learning period. We look forward to welcoming our students and staff back to school on Monday, February 8, 2021. You have been missed.

Through the intercession of Our Lady of Hope, we continue to pray for the well-being of our students, staff and families and for publicly funded Catholic Education.



Patrick J. Daly
Chairperson of the Board



David Hansen
Director of Education