



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

May 20, 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians,

At a news conference yesterday, Ontario Premier Doug Ford announced that schools will remain closed for the remainder of the school year. The decision was made in the interest of student safety as the government continues to unveil its framework for reopening the province.

While students will not be returning to their physical classrooms for the remainder of this school year, learning will continue from a distance. Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on students and student learning, and the disruption that home learning has presented to families, the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board is working closely with our principals, teachers and staff to continue to enhance the delivery of distance instruction as students continue to learn from the safety of their homes.

Your Feedback

In the meantime, the HWCDSB is hoping to hear from our students, parents and staff about your personal experiences with the home learning reality. Just as your experiences are varied, so too are your insights. We hope that you will take a few minutes to share your thoughts about your experiences with distance learning on ThoughtExchange, an online stakeholder engagement tool. This information is important to our ability to support students and families and continue to respond to student learning needs. ThoughtExchange will launch on May 20 and will remain open until Wednesday, May 27, 2020. Please visit the [ThoughtExchange portal](#) to share your thoughts and rate the thoughts of others. Your identity and answers will remain confidential. Your voice matters, so your participation is crucial and valued.

Synchronous/asynchronous Learning

There has been much discussion lately about synchronous (real-time) learning. Our teachers and staff are engaging in various forms of both synchronous and asynchronous (available for students at any time of the day) instruction and have made great efforts to incorporate new and engaging practices into their online classrooms. While synchronous learning is not possible for each and every teacher, student or family, we continue to work closely with our principals, teachers, support staff and families to create new and expanded opportunities for the use of video and audio interaction. This can be delivered in any number of modalities (including for example, email, telephone calls, small group engagement, audio and video lessons), which may vary from school to school and class to class, consistent with the teacher's professional understanding of what's best for his/her students. Attached to this letter are tip sheets for students and parents/guardians to improve your online learning experience. It is important to remember that ongoing engagement in learning is important to continued academic success.

Summer Learning

Other learning opportunities are being developed for the summer which will allow secondary students to earn a new credit or repeat a course, and students with special learning needs to participate in a two-week skills development program. Once again, we are working closely with the Ministry, our employee group representatives, principals and school teams to ensure that strict protocols are in place if and when schools reopen.

Health alert

In other updates, we want to alert parents to an increase in multisystem inflammatory vasculitis, a rare inflammatory illness in children with COVID-19. Symptoms include persistent fever, abdominal pain and gastrointestinal symptoms, including nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, as well as rash. Parents should contact their health care providers immediately if their children should present any of these symptoms. Learn more about [multisystem inflammatory vasculitis](#).

School reopening

A number of weeks ago our Board formed a re-entry committee to plan for the re-opening of schools for in-class instruction. The committee will continue its important work and will now focus on a re-opening in September. We will as well carefully review a plan for the re-opening of schools that the provincial government is currently working on and as well look at experiences in other jurisdictions.

At a recent Catholic Education Week mass, Bishop Crosby spoke of the hope that Jesus, through his life and death, brought into the world. "Instead of being sad when we look at Jesus on the cross, we experience hope," he said. "Hope helps us to look beyond our troubles to a better time, a better place, and it gives us courage to do our part, to make it a better place." That is what our reopening will be. Informed by your experiences on ThoughtExchange, inspired by the many examples of hope and goodness that abound throughout our system, and strengthened by our risen Lord who brings new life, we look forward to a future full of promise.

We want to recognize and express appreciation to the dedicated staff throughout our school system who have and continue to work very hard to provide the highest quality Catholic education possible during this time of dramatic change. We thank you, the parents and first teachers of your children, for your understanding and support throughout what we know has been an extremely challenging time for you and your families.

Earlier this month, Bishop Crosby consecrated our Diocese to Mary, Mother of the Church. We continue to offer prayer intentions to our Blessed Mother Mary for all those in our community, province and world who have been impacted by the pandemic.



Patrick J. Daly
Chairperson of the Board



David Hansen
Director of Education