

IMPORTANT INFORMATION REGARDING THE RETURN TO SCHOOL IN JANUARY: PLEASE READ CAREFULLY

December 31, 2021

Dear DPCDSB Families:

I hope that you and your family have been able to keep healthy and safe as we continue to face the challenges of COVID-19 in all aspects of our lives. As the Christmas Break winds down, we received notice from the Ontario Ministry of Education yesterday afternoon that all Ontario schools will be closed to students, **including students enrolled in self-contained Special Education classes**, on January 3 and 4, 2022. There will be no in-person or remote learning for any students on those two days. Both in-person and remote learning will resume on Wednesday, January 5, 2022.

Before and after school care programs will not operate while schools are closed to students. However, full day childcare centres will continue to operate.

In addition to the delayed return to school, the announcement included several other important items that impact school operations.

Daily Screening Verification

The Ministry of Education is requiring that students provide daily confirmation of COVID-19 screening. In this regard, students and families will be required to complete the confirmation of screening each day before coming to school. **Elementary students** must bring the *COVID-19 Daily Self Screening Verification Form* signed by a parent/guardian to school daily. The [COVID-19 School and Child Care Screening Tool](#) has been updated to identify new symptoms which would require students to stay home and not attend school. **Secondary students** must continue to provide proof that they passed the daily screening as they have been doing by displaying the “pass” on their smart phone or providing paper copy verification.

If **fully vaccinated students** experience any of the symptoms associated with COVID-19, they must **NOT** come to school and must self-isolate for 5 days. At the end of the five days, if their COVID symptoms improve for at least 24 hours, they may return to school. Siblings and other household contacts will be required to isolate as well for the five-day period.

If **unvaccinated students** experience any of the symptoms associated with COVID-19, they must **NOT** come to school and must self-isolate for 10 days. At the end of the 10 days, if they do not exhibit any COVID symptoms, they may return to school.

Option to Temporarily Switch to Remote Learning

The Ministry of Education has directed school boards to provide the option for families to switch from in-person learning to remote learning, even if for a temporary period.

Elementary Learning Modes

Elementary parents who wish to switch their child(ren) from in-person to remote learning will be required to commit to this learning mode exclusively from January 5 to February 22, without the opportunity to switch back to in-person learning until February 22. If you would like to pursue this option, please contact your

child(ren)'s teacher directly on Monday, January 3 or Tuesday, January 4. There will be no opportunity to undertake this option as of Wednesday, January 5.

Further information and direction regarding an option to change learning mode in elementary schools from February 22 onward is forthcoming.

Secondary Learning Modes

Secondary parents who wish to switch their child(ren) from in-person to remote will be required to commit to this learning mode from January 5 to February 3 without the opportunity to switch back to in-person learning until the start of semester two on February 3.

During this time, students will continue to be enrolled in their current classes/courses and will remain with their same teacher and classmates. Remote and in-person students will be taught simultaneously by the classroom/course teacher.

If you would like to pursue this option, please contact your child(ren)'s teacher directly on Monday, January 3 or Tuesday, January 4. There will be no opportunity to undertake this option as of Wednesday, January 5.

Learning Devices for Students

In connection to the option to temporarily switch to remote learning, parents who require a learning device for their child(ren) must also advise their child(ren)'s teacher through Google Classroom on Monday, January 3 or Tuesday, January 4 at the latest.

Additional Ministry-Directed Health and Safety Measures

As part of yesterday's announcement, the [Government of Ontario announced changes to public health measures](#), including:

- Updates to the [COVID-19 School and Child Care Screening Tool](#) ahead of the return to school on January 5.
- Providing optional non-fit-tested N95 masks for staff in schools and licensed childcare settings as an alternative to medical/surgical masks, and additional supply of high-quality three-ply cloth masks that are strongly encouraged and free for students and children.
- Continuing take-home PCR testing eligibility for highly symptomatic elementary and secondary students, education staff and participating private and First Nation operated schools who have received a PCR self-collection kit through their school.
- Temporarily permitting only low-contact indoor sports and safe extra-curricular activities. This includes temporarily suspending multi-cohort choirs and wind ensembles.
- To mitigate risks associated with the colder weather and gatherings/travel over the winter holidays and to limit the number of contacts for more vulnerable populations, elementary students will be required to cohort during recess and outdoor breaks to limit contacts as much as possible during this period.
- Updating COVID-19 reporting requirements for school boards and childcare facilities. The government has advised that contact tracing in the event of a positive COVID-19 cases will be suspended. In conjunction with this suspension to contact tracing, there will be no more cohort/class dismissals or community letters advising of cases in the school. However, as staff members are required to isolate, schools may encounter challenges obtaining replacement coverage. As a result, there may be occasions when classrooms or schools are required to temporarily switch entirely to remote learning. Schools will notify families as soon as possible should this occur.

- In conjunction with the above, communications to parents and the community in the event of a positive case in the school or classroom will also be suspended. As well, school boards are no longer required to maintain case recording and reporting of positive COVID cases on their websites.

Minimizing Operational School Closures

The Ministry of Education has provided strategies for boards to minimize school closures due to possible staffing challenges. This includes allowing school boards to combine classes and assign students to other classes to ensure supervision. While combining classes is an option to ensure supervision of students, we will make every effort to avoid use of this strategy, especially for possible extended staff absences. Please be advised that schools will be open on inclement weather days where transportation has been cancelled. Every effort will be made to maintain access to in-person learning.

Staff will continue to meet regularly with our local Regional Public Associate Medical Officers of Health to inform operational decisions and ensure health and safety measures are maximized.

Rapid Antigen Testing

Families are reminded to use the last 1-2 remaining Rapid Antigen Tests for students before returning to in-person learning on January 5 and to stay home if a student receives a positive test result.

The Ministry of Education will continue to work closely with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services (MGCS) to expand access to rapid antigen screening testing in schools.

For information on what to do if you believe that you or your children have been exposed to COVID-19, visit the Government of Ontario website at www.ontario.ca/exposed.

Thank you for your attention to these important updates. Additional information on these and other developments related on the return to school will be shared with you in the coming days and weeks.

Wishing you all a safe, blessed and Happy New Year.

Marianne Mazzorato, Ed.D.
Director of Education