

JUNE 28, 2021

WATERLOO REGION DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

NOTICE OF MEETING

The regular monthly **Board Meeting** of the Waterloo Region District School Board will be held via video conference, on **Monday, June 28, 2021, at 7:00 p.m.**

AGENDA

Call to Order

Territorial Acknowledgement and O Canada

Approval of Agenda

Consent Agenda**

Receipt/Approval of Minutes:

Approve Minutes – Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting of May 12, 2021

Receive Minutes – Board Meeting of May 31, 2021

Approve Minutes – Committee of the Whole Meeting of June 14, 2021

Approve Minutes – Special Budget Meeting of June 16, 2021

Receive Minutes – Special Board Meeting of June 16, 2021

Approve Minutes – Committee of the Whole Meeting of June 21, 2021

Receipt/Approval of Monthly Reports:

33 Staffing Information – Retirements and Resignations

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M. Weinert

Declarations of Pecuniary Interest

Announcements/Celebrating Board Activities

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Delegations

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E. Ranney / M. Gerard

COVID-19 Pandemic Verbal Update

J. Bryant / L. Read

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Trustee C. Millar

Student Senate Update*

Student Trustees

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Trustee L. Tremble

**All matters listed under the Consent Agenda are considered not to require debate by the Board of Trustees and should be approved in one motion in accordance with the recommendation contained in each report.

Board Communications

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Other Business

Question Period (10 minutes)

Future Agenda Items (Notices of motion to be referred to Agenda Development Committee)

Adjournment

*Standing Item



Report to Board of Trustees

June 28, 2021

Subject: Staffing Information – Retirements and Resignations

Recommendation

This report is provided for information of the Board.

Status

The employees listed in Appendix A of this report have received acknowledgement of their retirement or resignation.

Background

The board's practice is to receive information regarding staff retirements and resignations at regular monthly board meetings.

Financial implications

Expenses are within the existing approved budget.

Communications

Employees listed in this report have communicated through Human Resource Services.

Prepared by: Michael Weinert, Coordinating Superintendent, Human Resource Services, in consultation with Coordinating Council.

Staffing Statistics – Retirements
Current at June 28, 2021

Retirements: Elementary Teaching Staff				
First	Last	Position/Location	Retirement Date	Years of Service
Warren	Bullock	Teacher, Wellesley PS	June 30, 2021	29
Catherine	Campbell	Teacher, St. Jacobs PS	June 30, 2021	36
Susan	Carter-Hebel	Teacher, Crestview PS	June 30, 2021	29
Lori	Evelyn	Teacher, Stewart Avenue PS	June 30, 2021	31
Jo-Anne	Haramis	Teacher, Laurelwood PS	June 30, 2021	32
Lisa	Maynes	Itinerant Teacher, Special Education	June 30, 2021	29
Lynda	Morris	Teacher, Winston Churchill PS	June 30, 2021	31
Sheri	Stamp-Veitch	Teacher, Suddaby PS	June 30, 2021	16
Jane	Topper Dixon	Teacher, Prueter PS	June 30, 2021	32
Tania	Weber	Teacher, Smithson PS	June 30, 2021	25
Annette	Wolf-Does	Teacher, Brigadoon PS	June 30, 2021	33
Pete	Zister	Teacher, Margaret Avenue PS	June 30, 2021	31

Retirements: Secondary Teaching Staff				
First	Last	Position/Location	Retirement Date	Years of Service
Karen	Cort	Teacher, Kitchener CI	June 30, 2021	37
Joan	Crawford	Teacher, Glenview Park SS	June 30, 2021	28
Sandra	Fallis	Phys Ed Department Head, Cameron Heights CI	June 30, 2021	36
Mark	Fangrad	Teacher, Bluevale CI	June 30, 2021	30
Jeff	Gerber	Teacher, Waterloo Oxford District SS	June 30, 2021	31
Felicia	Pavelich	Teacher, Kitchener CI	June 30, 2021	31
Michael	Ratkaj	Tech Department Head, Waterloo Oxford District SS	June 30, 2021	27
Lynn	Schulze	ESL Department Head, Waterloo CI	June 30, 2021	31
Catherine	Sims	Teacher, Sir John A Macdonald SS	June 30, 2021	21
Wilma	Van Dyk	Teacher, Forest Heights CI	June 30, 2021	31

Staffing Statistics – Retirements
Current at June 28, 2021

Retirements: Administrative & Support Staff				
First	Last	Position/Location	Retirement Date	Years of Service
Gwen	Bowdring	Educational Assistant, Moffat Creek PS	June 30, 2021	36
Janice	Cober	Supervision Monitor, Grand River CI	August 31, 2021	16
Carol Ann	Collins	Head Custodian, Ryerson PS	July 30, 2021	31
Valerie	Garcia	Head Custodian, Rockway PS	August 31, 2021	33
Laura	Hagey-Nichols	Principal, Distance Learning	June 30, 2021	31
Catherine	Harmer	Educational Assistant, Moffat Creek PS	June 30, 2021	30
Leisa	Kuntz	Principal, Ryerson PS	June 30, 2021	31
Wendy	Madill	Assistant Office Supervisor, Huron Heights SS	August 31, 2021	20
Bernice	Pengelly	Educational Assistant, Preston High School	June 29, 2021	23
Nicole	Powell	Office Supervisor, Huron Heights SS	June 30, 2021	31
Brian	Wiechers	Vice Principal, Forest Hill PS	June 30, 2021	16

Staffing Statistics – Resignations
Current at June 28, 2021

Permanent Staff Resignations			
First	Last	Position/Location	Effective Date
Paige	Dawson	Educational Assistant, Special Education	June 30, 2021
Michelle	Dool	Secondary Teacher, Eastwood CI	August 14, 2021
Stephanie	Hodgson	Early Childhood Educator, Vista Hills PS	June 30, 2021
Andrew	Karley	Head Custodian, Janet Metcalfe PS	June 28, 2021
Stacey	Keller	Department Head, Galt CI	June 30, 2021
Izabela	Lizon	Secondary Teacher, Waterloo CI	June 30, 2021
Rachael	Quickfall	Elementary Teacher, Conestogo PS	June 22, 2021
Rob	Sutton	Educational Assistant, Special Education	June 30, 2021
Gregory	Wehrle	Certified Tradesperson, Maintenance	June 28, 2021
Steven	Woolner	Secondary Teacher, Waterloo CI	May 25, 2021



Report to Board of Trustees

June 28, 2021

Subject: Staffing Recommendations – Appointments

Recommendation

That the Waterloo Region District School Board approve the appointments to staff as outlined in the report titled “Staffing Recommendations – Appointments, dated June 28, 2021.

Status

The staff appointments as noted on Appendix A of this report are effective the dates indicated.

Background

The board’s practice has been to have appointments presented for information at regular monthly board meetings.

Financial implications

Expenses are within the existing approved budget.

Communications

Employees listed in this report have, or will be advised of the appointments.

Prepared by: Michael Weinert, Coordinating Superintendent, Human Resource Services, in consultation with Coordinating Council.

Staffing Information – New Appointments
Current at June 28, 2021

New Appointments: Administrative and Support Staff			
First	Last	Position / Location	Effective Date
Laura	Booth	Communications Officer	July 12, 2021
Estefania	Brandenstein	Communications Officer	July 5, 2021
Keitha	Frederick	International Admissions Officer	August 3, 2021
Crissa	Hill	Superintendent, Student Achievement & Wellbeing	July 1, 2021
Pam	Kaur	Superintendent, Student Achievement & Wellbeing	July 1, 2021
Della	Lataille-Herdsman	Superintendent, Student Achievement & Wellbeing	July 1, 2021

New Hires - due to retirements, resignations or leaves and are to replace full or part time vacancies.

Human Resource Services



Report to Board of Trustees

June 28, 2021

Subject: Recipients of the 2020-21 Linda Fabi Bursary

Recommendation

This report is for the information of the Board.

Status

The Linda Fabi Bursary will provide funding for students who are pursuing a trade, through college or apprenticeship, and who have not already been selected to receive an award at the graduation ceremony.

The Adjudication Committee, comprised of Linda Fabi, former Director of Education, Joanne Weston, Scott Piatkowski, and Jayne Herring, reviewed the applications submitted by the following students:

Asha Adderley	Grand River Collegiate Institute
Cody Bacher	Southwood Secondary School
Tyler Benninger	Eastwood Collegiate Institute
Thomas Borta	Grand River Collegiate Institute
Maxim Clayton	Preston High School
Joshua Dardarian	Jacob Hespeler Secondary School
Keyan Johnson	Cameron Heights Collegiate Institute
Jamie Stamp	Bluevale Collegiate Institute

The following criteria were taken into consideration:

1. The student's key characteristics
2. An example of how the student has demonstrated perseverance or has overcome obstacles or made a remarkable comeback during his/her high school career
3. A staff member's recommendation

All eight applicants were confirmed to meet the criteria and were selected to receive the 2020-21 Linda Fabi Bursary.

Background

The Linda Fabi Bursary was established by the Board of Trustees in celebration and recognition of the many contributions and achievements of Linda Fabi during her tenure as Director of Education for the Waterloo Region District School Board.

The total amount of the Bursary this year is \$2,000, which is to be presented to students of the Waterloo Region District School Board. Depending on the number of applicants, this award can be divided so that a number of eligible applicants can be recognized. This year each student will receive \$250.

Financial implications

An amount of \$2,000 will be charged annually to the Trustee expense budget. This is the seventh year the award has been issued.

Communications

The announcement of the Linda Fabi Bursary recipients will be shared with all schools, staff, students, and the public via the Board website.

Prepared by: John Bryant, Director of Education
 Heather McKinna, Administrative Assistant to Chairperson & Trustees
 Stephanie Reidel, Manager, Corporate Services
 in consultation with Coordinating Council



Report to Board of Trustees

June 28th, 2021

Subject: French Immersion Review Committee Update

Recommendation

This report is for the information of the Board.

Status

The French Immersion Review Committee has begun Phase 3 of the work of the review. The Committee met 3 times on April 20th, May 25th and June 22nd. The Committee has representation from Trustees, parents of students in French Immersion, parents of students in Core French programs, French Immersion students, Core French students, school administrators and appropriate central staff.

The first task of Phase 3 was to establish a vision, goals and guiding principles for French Language Programming in the Waterloo Region District School Board. A document articulating the vision, goals and principles is in the final stages of revision. The final version will be shared with the French Immersion Review Committee when it resumes its work in the fall.

The French Immersion Review Committee will meet again in the fall to continue addressing the main areas needing improvement in the Malatest Report. Recommendations from the Committee will be presented to the Board early in 2022.

Background

The French Immersion Review includes four Phases.

Phase 1:

Phase 1 began in September 2017 when an Ad Hoc Committee with representation from Trustees, parents, students and staff was formed in response to a Trustee Motion initiating a review of the WRDSB's French Immersion Program. The Committee was to review our French Immersion and Extended French program models and the delivery for elementary and secondary students. The review is to include issues concerning staffing challenges, equitable access for all students, transportation and the advantages and disadvantages of a French Immersion Magnet School.

The French Immersion Review Committee met over a series of meetings to analyze information relevant to the objectives outlined in the Trustees' motion.

The FI Review Committee submitted a final report to the Board on April 28th, 2018.

Phase 2:

Phase 2 began with Trustee approval of \$150,000.00 from accumulated surplus to be committed to initiate a broader review of the French Immersion Program in support of the recommendations in the report presented to Trustees at the April 23, 2018 Committee of the Whole meeting.

Malatest & Associates Ltd. was contracted to conduct a review of French Immersion Programming. A final report from Malatest was submitted to the Waterloo Region District School Board in October 2020.

Phase 3:

The French Immersion Review Committee began the work of Phase 3 in April 2021 to review the findings of the Malatest Report and identify main areas to be addressed. The Committee has responded to the first recommendation of the Malatest report which was to articulate a clear vision and goals for French Language Programming in the Waterloo Region District School Board.

Phase 4:

It is anticipated that Phase 4 will begin in February of 2022. This phase will focus on implementation of the final recommendations brought forward to the Board by the French Immersion Review Committee.

Financial implications

No financial implications at this time.

Communications

A plan for community consultation will be developed in the fall. At that time, typical internal and external communications will occur.

Prepared by: Elaine Ranney, Superintendent Student Achievement & Well-being
Matthew Gerard, Coordinating Superintendent, Business Services and Treasurer of the Board
John Bryant, Director of Education (in consultation with Coordinating Council)

French Immersion Review Committee Members 2020-2021
Updated: May 25, 2021

	Member Name	Position/Department
1.	Agar, Lauren	Manager of Planning
2.	Ahluwalia, Deepa	Human Rights and Equity Advisor
3.	Bileski, Karin	French Immersion Administrator
4.	Bond, James	System Administrator
5.	Bond, Mandi	Non-French Immersion Parent
6.	Cresswell, Lucia	Secondary French Teacher
7.	Crits, Jennifer	French Immersion Administrator
8.	Gerard, Matthew	Coordinating Superintendent, Business Services & Treasurer of the Board
9.	Giannopoulos, Tina	French Immersion Teacher
10.	Gillespie, Erica	French Immersion Administrator
11.	Jenkins, Melissa	French Immersion Parent
12.	John-Jandles, Tristan	Student Trustee
13.	Kay, Sydney	Non-French Immersion Parent
14.	Liebermann, Dana	Senior Manager, Research & Evidence-Based Practice
15.	Martin, Ted	Community Member
16.	McDonald, Rowan	Student Trustee
17.	Nasimi, Halima	Non-French Immersion Parent
18.	Nasimi, Haroon	Non-French Immersion Parent
19.	Piatkowski, Scott	Trustee
20.	Ranney, Elaine	Superintendent, Student Achievement & Well-Being

21.	Read, Lila	Associate Director of Education
22.	Reed, Shelly	Non-French Immersion Parent
23.	Ringwood, Stephanie	Elementary Distance Learning French Immersion Vice-Principal
24.	Smit, Adam	Secondary French Teacher
25.	Smith, Kathi	Trustee
26.	Student Representative #1	
27.	Student Representative #2	
28.	Student Representative #3	
29.	Student Representative #4	
30.	Teall Breeze, Katrina	Consultant - Indigenous, Equity, and Human Rights Department, Indigenous Education Branch
31.	Thakkar, Dipali	Non-French Immersion Parent
32.	Tremble, Laurie	Trustee



Report to Board

June 28, 2021

Subject: Trustee Self-Evaluation 2021

Recommendation

This report is provided for information.

Status

Between May 11-18, 2021 Trustees were invited to complete a self-evaluation survey as an opportunity to share their experiences and communicate their needs to each other. This survey was voluntary and respondents could skip any question they did not want to answer.

All 11 WRDSB Trustees participated in the Self-evaluation. The responses can be found in Appendix A.

Background

The Waterloo Region District School Board Policy G400 (Board of Trustees Planning Cycle and Evaluations) provides for the following:

3.1.4 An annual performance self-assessment of the Board of Trustees, augmented by broader input at the discretion of the Board of Trustees.

Trustees currently have an Ad Hoc Committee designated to review this process. This is the first time trustees will use the new survey.

Financial implications

There are no known financial implications at this time.

Communications

No further communication is required at this time.

Prepared by: Stephanie Reidel, Manager of Corporate Services, on behalf of the Ad Hoc Trustee Self-Evaluation Committee.

Trustee Self-Evaluation - Spring 2021 Report

Between May 11-18, 2021 Trustees were invited to complete a self-evaluation survey as an opportunity to share their experiences and communicate their needs to each other. This survey was voluntary and respondents could skip any question they did not want to answer.

All 11 WRDSB Trustees participated in the Self-evaluation. Below are the responses they provided.

Relationships Among Trustees

1 - Please rate your level of agreement for the following statements about the Board of Trustees as a whole group. The Board of Trustees....

Question	Strongly agree		Somewhat agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Somewhat disagree		Strongly disagree		Total
	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	
Practices active listening (Active listening is a way of listening and responding to another person that improves mutual understanding)	9.09%	1	63.64%	7	0.00%	0	18.18%	2	9.09%	1	11
Respects the opinions of others while working to reach a consensus	9.09%	1	63.64%	7	0.00%	0	18.18%	2	9.09%	1	11
Makes room at the board table so that divergent views can be heard	9.09%	1	54.55%	6	9.09%	1	18.18%	2	9.09%	1	11
Supports an open and encouraging approach to sharing their views	9.09%	1	45.45%	5	9.09%	1	36.36%	4	0.00%	0	11
Works together to promote positive interactions amongst themselves	0.00%	0	54.55%	6	36.36%	4	9.09%	1	0.00%	0	11
Works together to address negative interactions amongst themselves	9.09%	1	45.45%	5	18.18%	2	27.27%	3	0.00%	0	11
Has an understanding of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour	18.18%	2	54.55%	6	18.18%	2	9.09%	1	0.00%	0	11

Relationships With Other Stakeholders

2 - Please rate your level of agreement for the following statements about the Board of Trustees as a whole group. The Board of Trustees....

The community

Question	Strongly agree		Somewhat agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Somewhat disagree		Strongly disagree		Total
Understands the importance of gathering feedback from the community	36.36%	4	45.45%	5	18.18%	2	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	11
Establishes appropriate processes for gathering community input	18.18%	2	36.36%	4	27.27%	3	18.18%	2	0.00%	0	11
Engages communities in ongoing conversations	18.18%	2	18.18%	2	27.27%	3	36.36%	4	0.00%	0	11

The student voice from system

Question	Strongly agree		Somewhat agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Somewhat disagree		Strongly disagree		Total
Makes deliberate efforts to actively seek out student voice from throughout the system	36.36%	4	36.36%	4	0.00%	0	27.27%	3	0.00%	0	11
Makes deliberate efforts to incorporate student voice from throughout the system	18.18%	2	54.55%	6	0.00%	0	18.18%	2	9.09%	1	11

Staff

Question	Strongly agree		Somewhat agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Somewhat disagree		Strongly disagree		Total
Holds the Director of Education accountable in meeting their duties (e.g., effectively implementing the policies of the board)	36.36%	4	36.36%	4	18.18%	2	9.09%	1	0.00%	0	11
Engages in respectful, cooperative and collaborative interactions with staff	27.27%	3	36.36%	4	36.36%	4	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	11
Ensures there are mechanisms in place to recognize and celebrate students, staff, community members and volunteers	9.09%	1	18.18%	2	45.45%	5	27.27%	3	0.00%	0	11

Other

Question	Strongly agree		Somewhat agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Somewhat disagree		Strongly disagree		Total
Protects and promotes Human Rights and ensures Equity while focused on student achievement and well-being	9.09%	1	72.73%	8	0.00%	0	18.18%	2	0.00%	0	11
Are accountable to all members of the community, not just those in the area in which they were elected	27.27%	3	36.36%	4	0.00%	0	36.36%	4	0.00%	0	11
Ensures that local municipal, provincial and federal politicians understand local issues and needs, and encourages them to make education a high priority	27.27%	3	18.18%	2	36.36%	4	18.18%	2	0.00%	0	11

The Board Function

3 - Please rate your level of agreement for the following statements about the Board of Trustees as a whole group. The Board of Trustees....

Question	Strongly agree		Somewhat agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Somewhat disagree		Strongly disagree		Total
Has an understanding of the budget process and is an effective steward of the board's resources	27.27%	3	27.27%	3	45.45%	5	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	11
Oversees the establishment of a balanced budget that reflects the board's vision, the needs of the community, and supports the board's strategic plan	36.36%	4	27.27%	3	27.27%	3	9.09%	1	0.00%	0	11
Complies with all applicable laws, regulations and policies governing the board or enacted by the government	63.64%	7	27.27%	3	9.09%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	11
Follows/has an understanding of board policies including conflict of interest policies and communication protocols	9.09%	1	72.73%	8	9.09%	1	9.09%	1	0.00%	0	11
Reviews and provides feedback on policies in achieving the board's goals	27.27%	3	45.45%	5	9.09%	1	18.18%	2	0.00%	0	11
Uses data and/or evidence to make informed decisions	9.09%	1	54.55%	6	18.18%	2	18.18%	2	0.00%	0	11
Utilizes a human rights and equity lens in decision-making	18.18%	2	27.27%	3	45.45%	5	9.09%	1	0.00%	0	11
Consistently uses the meeting time well (i.e., issues get the time and attention proportionate to their importance)	9.09%	1	18.18%	2	36.36%	4	36.36%	4	0.00%	0	11
Comes to meetings prepared and ready to contribute	18.18%	2	54.55%	6	27.27%	3	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	11

General Feedback

4 - Would you be interested in engaging in a process to reflect on your practice as a Trustee?

Answer	Count
Yes	10
No	1
Total	11

5 - In what areas do you feel the Board of Trustees would benefit from more professional development:

Themes

Human Rights and Equity

Budget & Audit

Governance (e.g., policy & procedures, role of trustees)

Need to have in person interactions

Board Relationships (e.g., Cohesiveness, need for in person interactions)

Communications

Engage with diverse community groups

Engaging various consultants

Student Achievement (e.g., Supporting underserved and students with special needs)

Utilizing technology in the role of trustee

6 - What opportunities exist in our work?

Themes

Advocate for Human Rights and Equity

Bring change to the boardroom (e.g., bringing student voice to the boardroom)

Relationship building

Staff-trustee relationship (e.g, build trust with senior staff, celebrate the work of staff, ensure staff have the resources they need, holding staff accountable)

Community-trustee relationship (e.g., Engage with diverse members of the community, make a difference for families and communities, rebuild trust with the community)

Continue to engage stakeholders in policy development

Ongoing opportunities to learn and adapt

Setting direction

Student trustees being full board members

7 - What challenges exist in our work?

Themes

Relationship with the Community:

- Listening to many community groups
 - Supporting different communities
 - Whole board of trustees not reflecting the community they serve
 - Re-establishing trust in public education
-

Relationship among Trustees

- Inability to collaborate effectively with each other due to working remotely
 - Lack of communication
 - Lack of trust
 - Openness to hearing diverse views
-

Relationship between staff and trustees

Common understanding among trustees about Human Rights and Equity issues

Keeping the focus on students, families and staff and not politics

Re-engaging students

Lack of training received by trustees

Navigating social media

Government acting hostile toward public education

Transitioning from the COVID-19 School Experience

An OPSBA
Discussion Paper

MAY 2021



Reflections

Supporting students in-risk has been a challenge; especially when circumstances create distance between students and in-person supports. **Stephen Blok, Superintendent of Education-Program Services, Renfrew County DSB**

Issues related to who has chosen virtual learning, who has been most severely impacted and who have experienced issues such as food security have highlighted the inequities in our communities and the impact of barriers that many families experience even pre-Covid. **Shirley Chan, Executive Superintendent — Learning Centre, Toronto DSB**

The technical issues like devices and access to the internet have a technical solution through deployment of resources. However, it has truly been the adaptive challenges that are hard to find the solutions for, as they are varied and personal. **Camille Williams-Taylor, Director of Education, Ottawa-Carleton DSB**

We need to build upon what may have been gained for our learners through these Covid times. **Rosemary Stiglic, Secondary Principal, Peel DSB**

A commitment to not return to a system that was not previously serving all learners... embedding practices that address anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism, incorporating both Black and Indigenous histories and learning. **Patrice Barnes, Trustee, Durham DSB**

The pandemic has shone a spotlight on the inequities in education, particularly around access to learning and supports outside of school. **AJ Keene, Superintendent of Education, Lakehead DSB**

To help students learn, we must address their need to experience belonging; their physical, social-emotional, and identity safety. **Prince Duah, Superintendent of Instruction, Ottawa-Carleton DSB**

Mental health supports will be crucial. This pandemic has put a toll on us all and ensuring that students will emerge stronger than ever before is very important. **Zachary Garbaty, Ontario Student Trustees' Association, Grand Erie DSB**

There has never been a more important time to prioritize mental health promotion and prevention as part of regular school life. All students benefit when we create mentally healthy classrooms, and support learning that strengthens students' sense of wellness, identity, confidence, and belonging. **Kathy Short, Executive Director, School Mental Health Ontario**

Introduction

Since first declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization in March 2020, COVID-19 has been, and continues to be, one of the great social and economic disruptors of our time with widespread impact on one of society’s most traditional institutions — school.

The pandemic has accentuated long-standing and largely unchanged school structures and processes directed by government policy and associated funding streams. The pandemic disruption has also exposed how some of these structures have compromised policy commitments regarding equitable access and opportunity for student communities. These inequities are inevitably linked to students’ overall well-being and future prospects. Now is the time to take stock of, and act on, existing structures and what has been learned especially in light of the challenges and opportunities revealed throughout the pandemic. This is not the time to simply go back to what was done previously, but to challenge our collective selves to reimagine what schools could become to ensure that each and every student in our care thrives in school and in life.

This discussion document reflects the initial thinking of Ontario Public School Boards’ Association (OPSBA) membership from first-hand accounts of remote¹ and online learning during the pandemic. Perspectives include those from remote and northern boards, school boards from large urban centres, and largely rural communities across the province. This process of reflection has revealed two compelling realities: that a worrisome number of students have been unable to profit from remote forms of learning; and

that several innovative practices in pedagogy and leadership have emerged that should be preserved and implemented on a broader scale post-pandemic.

The document is designed to elicit collaborative dialogue with education partners by identifying key questions to build on current observations, identify the need for further study, and to create a frame for a new vision for school. This document builds on OPSBA’s two former documents, *What if? and A Vision for Learning and Teaching in a Digital Age*.

The discussion document will explore the following questions:

- **What are we observing during the COVID-19 experience?**
- **What does the emerging research tell us?**
- **What do we need to find out?**
- **What should we do about what we know?**
- **What could school look like in the years beyond the COVID-19 pandemic?**

¹ “Remote and online learning” refers to the broad spectrum of learning formats that rely on connection to the Internet. In this discussion, “remote” learning refers to all school configurations during the COVID-19 pandemic where students participated in school from home by choice or by necessity. In some school boards and at other times, this concept is referred to as “virtual” or “distance” learning.

What are we observing during the COVID-19 experience?

Since March 2020, online learning in Ontario schools has undergone a rapid transformation as a result of intermittent school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At various points during the pandemic and for various periods of time, all K-12 students, their parents/guardians, teachers and other educators have needed to adapt to what Hodges and colleagues described as “emergency remote teaching” (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust & Bond, 2020, p. 3). This shift represented a marked diversion from previous online learning configurations and a novel learning environment for most K-12 learners.

Throughout this time, educators at all levels have rallied to plan, create and implement dramatically different learning conditions for students. Given the magnitude of this uncharted territory, members of the education community have held fast in their unwavering dedication and commitment to student achievement and well-being. The herculean efforts to constantly adapt “school” were a result of well-established collaborative relationships, the dedication of school board leadership, but most importantly, the ability to leverage existing infrastructures and staff expertise in our school boards and school board consortia.

Understandably, remote learning from home during the COVID-19 pandemic prioritized student and community health and safety. To accomplish this goal, students learned at home by necessity when schools were closed, or by choice as schools re-opened for in-person learning, using a variety of teaching models (asynchronous, synchronous, hybrid). However, educators have made the following observations about teaching and learning under these conditions, observations that reinforce the essential supports needed for student achievement and well-being, but also point to opportunities that are worthy of further study.

Inspiring educators and models of remote learning

The success of rapid implementation of emergency remote learning stems in large part from committed, resourceful educators rising to this unprecedented challenge: facilitating meaningful learning for all students using technology, adaptive pedagogy, and alternative communication strategies on a scale never previously required. Novel approaches under trying conditions over extended periods of time, however, have taken a toll on educator resiliency amplified by concerns over student achievement, well-being, and engagement and educators’ own concerns over their personal safety.

Much has been observed from the models of remote learning² implemented and modified during the pandemic. While remote learning has been available to some students for many years, remote learning conditions during the pandemic are significantly different than previous models, for example:

- Previously developed e-learning or distance-learning platforms allowed school boards to “jump start” remote learning on a larger scale as required.
- For varying periods of time, remote learning has been the only available learning model for students.
- Remote learning platforms have been used for students in Kindergarten through Grade 12.
- With great effort, many areas of the curriculum have been made available through online platforms, even curriculum designed for hands-on experiential learning.

Active participation in remote learning also requires that:

- students learn from home. This requires homes to have reliable and affordable internet service to meet the Ministry of Education’s minimum online participation requirements.

² As per PPM 164, remote learning is defined by combinations of *synchronous* learning (learning facilitated by educators and occurring in real time) and *asynchronous* learning (learning facilitated by educators but not occurring in real-time). Adapted/hybrid models of remote learning have evolved over the course of the pandemic based on local contexts.

- students have consistent access to digital devices and software to participate fully, especially during synchronous learning, which constitutes the bulk of mandated instructional time according to PPM 164.
- students' home learning environments³ allow students periods of focused study and age-appropriate adult supervision while balancing other responsibilities or distractions.

No matter how well-intentioned various remote learning models have been, educators have observed troubling trends, such as:

1. Not all families have access to reliable internet services due largely to issues of affordability and where they live.
2. Not all students/families have access to sufficient number of digital devices for students living in the household, due largely to issues of affordability of the devices and of internet services.
3. With much reduced access to direct teacher support, many students require consistent, alternative adult support, (e.g., from older siblings and/or parents/guardians) in order to engage meaningfully in remote learning.
4. Some students struggle to maintain engagement during synchronous learning sessions. School boards are currently following up with increasing numbers of students who no longer attend school, either through remote or in-person learning models.
5. Increasing numbers of students report feelings of isolation, stress, worry, boredom and loneliness associated with the pandemic.

Educators have also observed positive outcomes from the use of remote learning models. For example:

1. Some students have adapted readily to synchronous learning opportunities, effectively using digital tools to communicate, collaborate and demonstrate their learning. Other students have benefited from the opportunity to learn without the social and physical distractors of busy school environments. In some cases, student achievement has improved while learning remotely. More study is required here to better understand the scale of these reports, the students most affected, and the learning conditions leading to their success.
2. Educators have shown remarkable innovation in quickly adapting to instructional and assessment practices that accommodate remote learning realities while balancing student achievement and well-being.
3. Educators have capitalized on remote learning technology to collaborate more with colleagues, facilitate ad hoc discussions and scheduled meetings, to co-teach, and to learn about new resources.
4. Family engagement has shifted. Parents/guardians working from home have been able to observe much more closely how their children engage with curriculum, communicate with peers, maintain momentum, and develop critical learning skills. Meeting times have become more flexible, allowing parents/guardians to join in virtual meetings at more mutually convenient times.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

How do we continue to inspire educators to integrate pedagogical practices developed during the pandemic into their teaching practice when students safely return to in-person learning?

³ This includes times when young students have engaged in remote learning but from a child-care setting instead of from home.

Bricks and mortar schools/In-person learning and the importance of belonging

Traditionally, school buildings serve as hubs for learning, critical social interaction and community connection. With fluctuating access to school buildings during the pandemic, school boards have had to recreate schools remotely. This has included the development of innovative co-curricular online opportunities where students have come together to support community-based actions and participate in online clubs. While student learning has continued in various formats, remote schooling has reduced opportunities for important student-student and teacher-student interaction resulting in worrisome levels of student disengagement. Recently, educators have identified that remote learning has triggered increases in homeschooling, exemptions from remote learning options, “ghosting” (students logging in to remote learning, turning off cameras, and not responding when teachers attempt to engage them). This degree

of disengagement has resulted in reports of increased concern over potential credit loss. One Toronto teacher reflected on how important it was for him to come to school as a teenager:

“I came to school mainly for the sports and to see my friends,” he said. “Indirectly, I became part of a school and a learning environment, but if I didn’t have those reasons to come and that space to be in ... No one’s checking for me. I had no reason to go there. It’s easy to leave.” (*K. Mitchell, as reported by Jessica Wang, CBC News*).

Parent/guardian and family connections have also changed in unique ways: for some, parents/guardians have been able to directly observe teacher-student interactions and the content of the curriculum. Similarly, greater parent/guardian attendance has been observed at School Council meetings and other school-hosted information sessions on a range of topics. This represents a new opportunity to engage parents/guardians further and promote the positive effects their involvement has on student achievement.

The need to provide environmentally safe learning spaces in school buildings has drawn greater attention to the condition of school buildings and portable classrooms. Aging infrastructure, inadequate air circulation systems, availability of technology for both on and off-site learners and undersized common areas have challenged school boards’ capacity to optimize fluctuating learning formats for students.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

What supports are needed to re-engage students and restore a sense of school community and belonging?



Digital Citizenship and Cyber-security

Remote learning platforms must always respect the safety and security of all participants. The use of online cameras to facilitate student-teacher and student-student interaction has raised privacy questions when teachers' and students' homes become "classrooms." Improving user privacy (such as turning cameras off) in these instances sometimes reduces the spontaneous classroom interactions that facilitate personalized instruction and authentic assessment.

The dependence on remote learning environments on the scale required during the pandemic has tested the strength of good digital citizenship instruction, and has unfortunately led to instances of harm, such as the use of offensive language online often by unidentifiable participants, and inappropriate exchanges targeting educators and students. School boards have also had to invest in improved cyber-security following large-scale breaches during critical periods, e.g., hacked Zoom calls, and system networks corrupted by malware.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

What has emerged from remote learning experiences that can inform future instruction about digital citizenship in school and the broader community?

Inclusion and Equity of Access, Outcomes, and Opportunity

Equity and inclusion work in school systems has, in recent years, shifted its stance from equitable access to equitable student outcomes. However, remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of continued advocacy for equitable access to the infrastructure fundamental to successful remote learning. In addition to factors such as access to specialized learning supports, authentic interpersonal relationships, physical safety, and psychological security, educators have observed that underachievement in school, and its consequential relationship to learning outcomes and future opportunities, has now become a function of access to reliable internet connectivity and digital learning devices in the home.

Schools traditionally play a key role in providing equitable access to learning resources, a full range of learning support programs and personnel, facilitating food security for families, much of which became out of reach for families oppressed by economic insecurity, systemic discrimination, and their physical distance from accessible internet service. Educational opportunities for students requiring special education supports and services during school closures has been particularly challenging (programs are designed to be accessible within the school building and grounds) to provide learning resources and specialized equipment often dependent on school infrastructure, and to sometimes include significant levels of adult assistance and physical care.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

Given the effects of the pandemic on racialized and economically insecure communities, what should we be advocating for in order to fully realize the aspirations within the Ontario Education Equity Action Plan?

What does the emerging research tell us?

Researchers around the world have quickly begun to document the consequences of the pandemic on public school systems. Some evidence has emerged quickly; other effects will develop over time, and many results to date are specific to varying education contexts globally prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Common to much of the emerging research is the caveat that many of the effects of the pandemic on schooling are linked to “emergency remote learning” (Hodges et al., 2020, p. 3). Unlike previous remote learning implementation, the pandemic forced plans for remote learning to be developed quickly, to include all or most students all or some of the time, and to be responsive to frequent changes in government policy designed to minimize the ill-effects of COVID-19 on public health and the economy. As articulated frequently in public policy statements, emergency remote learning prioritized public health first, everything else second. Despite the sense of urgency and time restrictions, planning for emergency remote learning included many of the fundamentals of effective online learning: modality (ratio of synchronous, asynchronous, hybrid), role of the instructor, tasks for students, pacing, student-teacher ratio, communication platforms, pedagogy, assessment, and feedback (Means, Bakia & Murphy, 2014).

Despite schools’ efforts to implement well-grounded remote learning conditions, the speed and scale of implementation drew researchers’ attention to early impacts of implementation in several areas: teacher practice, students’ academic achievement, mental health, and other educational outcomes typically tracked in education research. Increasingly, research is turning attention to the transition to the post-pandemic period, and how education may be improved by the (hard) lessons learned because of the pandemic. In jurisdictions that routinely gather demographic data, research has been able to analyze early pandemic effects by student age and identity (e.g., race, gender, participation in subsidized lunch programs, etc.). These analyses have provided a more detailed picture of the differential effects of emergency remote learning and evidence supporting future change.

Teaching – The research to date on teachers and teaching in Canada during the pandemic is very limited, and notably less than the early research on student learning over the same period. While the largely perceptual research being conducted with teachers cannot be generalized at this point, it describes authentic details about teaching during the pandemic. Barbour and LaBonte (2020) gathered narratives of teachers’ lived experiences from across Canada. Given the different teaching contexts for each participant (variations in teaching experience, location, elementary/secondary, subject areas), a number of common themes emerged:

- **Pace** — teachers reported a significant increase in the pace of their work. There was more to do, especially in communication with students, parents/guardians and colleagues when students were online, and monitoring and supporting COVID-19 protocol compliance when students were in-class.
- **Pedagogy** — online teaching required teachers to quickly adapt to pedagogy that would work in an online format, possibly pedagogies that were new to them, and relied on technological knowledge they did not already possess. Flexibility became essential in responding to student attendance patterns, technology malfunctions, and student input.
- **Facilitating student engagement** — maintaining student engagement became challenging when students were not attending in-person, and disengagement became a constant worry for teachers.
- **Individual differences** — to varying degrees, all teacher stories recounted scenarios where individual students achieved better under remote learning conditions than when in school. Some students were able to learn more quickly; some preferred the relative quiet of their home environment; some took advantage of new communication strategies (chat rooms, text messages, emails) to access teacher support; some explored innovative strategies to create student work that clearly demonstrated what they’d learned. Other

students spent more time doing schoolwork than previously, possibly because of limited options outside of school, but possibly because they had greater control of their learning time.

A more structured study by Sokol, Trudel and Bobb (2020) at the University of Winnipeg compared teacher efficacy, attitudes and perceptions of support early in the pandemic and at the end of the 2019–2020 school year with more than 1,600 teachers across Canada. Their findings showed irregularities in how teachers typically respond to change. For instance, during significant workplace changes, it is predictable that attitudes toward the change are reflected in change behaviour; for instance, negative attitudes predict little or no change. In the early phases of the pandemic, when teachers were required to quickly make significant changes to their work, attitudes of exhaustion and cynicism could be expected. If sustained, such attitudes often led to under-accomplishment. As anticipated, teachers in this study reported that exhaustion and cynicism increased as the pandemic wore on, however, their sense of accomplishment (in teaching remotely) increased. This led to increased perceptions of teacher efficacy. In other words, while teachers pushed through their increasing fatigue and worry, they felt their efforts were paying off, at least for the students who remained engaged. Teachers' feelings of efficacy, however, remain fragile. An update to this same study (February 2021) concluded: "While we would expect the pandemic and the changes it causes to provoke stress, what's most concerning is that teachers reported high stress for such a long duration, a situation that commonly leads to burnout. This suggests that teachers require a decrease in demands, an increase in resources, or both, to ensure they can remain resilient and be their best self at work (p. 2)."

More has been documented about the observed effects of COVID-era learning on students. The research examines a range of effects on students during times of full school closures to full in-school attendance during the pandemic. While student achievement is linked to well-being and mental health, the research discusses distinct pandemic-related outcomes for each.

Student Achievement — Because learning in school is usually segmented by time (years, semesters, etc.), school closures began to raise concerns about the potential impact on loss of learning (Defeyter et al., 2020; Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020). Previous research on school closures (e.g., due to natural disasters, prolonged labour disruptions, summer holidays) has produced inconsistent results in the degree to which students' learning lags when schools are closed. It stands to reason that if learning is associated with time, then loss of time would affect learning. Given that students in Ontario were out of school for a few weeks, the concern over potential learning loss has been mitigated somewhat by students being able to return to school learning either in-person, remotely, or a hybrid of the two.

However, as school disruptions during the pandemic continue, Zhao (2021) and others caution that return-to-school plans focusing on learning loss may be counterproductive and lead to undesirable outcomes.

Zhao particularly warns against a resurgence in standardized testing, increased demand for remedial programs (especially in math and reading) for short-term gain (Dean & Kuhn, 2007; Kapur, 2014, 2016) and the unnecessary pressures such approaches may add to students as they return to school. Instead, Zhao recommends that return-to-school plans prioritize "meeting students where they are" (p. 4) and attending to all educational outcomes such as curiosity, adaptability, independence and resilience. This approach will allow attention and resources to address pressing concerns about the widening gaps between students from have and have-not communities.

In Canada, the US, and the UK, research points to significant inequities in how certain communities have been able to respond to school closures or degrees of remote learning. In the Canadian context, James (2020) writes that students living in racialized, low-income communities have struggled to engage fully in pandemic-era school alternatives. Such communities are experiencing higher than average rates of COVID-19 (meaning more illness), less access to home internet (meaning less participation in remote learning), and higher rates of working in essential services (meaning fewer adults at home to assist students as needed) — all factors projected to increase the risk of compromised student achievement. Other research express parallel views from various parts of the world, e.g., from British Columbia, (Gautreau & Hales, 2020); United States (van Dorn, Cooney & Sabin, 2020; Dorn, Hancock, Sarakatsannis & Viruleg, 2020; Lund, 2020); Australia (O’Sullivan, Rahamathula & Pawar, 2020), and the UK (Defeyter et al., 2020) — in sum, learning conditions during the pandemic worsened disproportionately for students with pre-existing systemic disadvantages.

Well-being and mental health — Increasingly, research attention is being drawn to the current and potential latent effects of the pandemic on students’ overall well-being and mental health. Early cross-sectional survey findings point to a heightened level of worry, sadness, irritability, loneliness, and isolation amongst children and youth in Canada and elsewhere in relation to the pandemic and related public health restrictions (Ford, John, & Gunnell, 2021; Maximum City Report, 2020; Public Health Ontario, 2021). These elevations are not unexpected in the context of a global pandemic that serves to both threaten protective factors for wellness and increase risk factors for mental illness.

Reduced Protective Factors for well-being include:

- Less healthy movement and increased sedentary behaviour and screen time
- Less time outdoors
- Less interaction with a range of caring adults
- Less interaction with peers
- Less predictable structure and inconsistent routines
- Less access to a range of learning modalities

Risk Factors for mental health problems include:

- Family financial strain and conflict
- Social isolation and loneliness
- Disrupted/changed sleep and eating patterns and routines
- Worries about health of self and others
- Worries about academic performance
- Loss and grief

In the meantime, schools have an important role to play in terms of wellness promotion and prevention of mental health problems. As always, ensuring a welcoming, inclusive and safe in-person and remote school environment is foundational to student engagement and learning. Helping students to build habits and skills that enhance their strengths and personal resiliency can ease the burden of pandemic disruptions and loss. And offering mental health literacy learning to students in developmentally-appropriate ways can help them to understand the importance of caring for their mental well-being. Further, we know that child and youth mental health is mediated through adult wellness. When adults

can practice and model active coping and send hopeful messages, young people are better able to thrive through adversity. In the normal school context, much of this social-emotional learning, relationship-building, and strength-based care happens informally through day-to-day interactions (Barbour & Labonte, 2020; Lund, 2020; Maximum City Report, 2020).

In terms of prevention, early findings show that some students are more at risk for mental health problems than others. Those who are more disadvantaged by a loss of protective factors (e.g., reduced access to counseling services, sports and recreation, learning, nutrition programs), or more impacted due to risk factors (e.g., food insecurity, poor physical health, pre-existing mental health problems) may experience more pronounced emotional concerns during the pandemic (Dorn et al., 2020; Maximum City Report, 2020; Parolin & Van Lancker, 2020).

In summary, research findings to date about the effects of COVID-19 on teaching and learning in public schools mirror the observations noted by educators across the country. Teachers have regularly had to make significant adjustments to their pedagogical practice in order to accommodate shifts in learning formats brought about by measures implemented to curb COVID-19 infection rates. These teaching conditions have caused significant stress, much of it borne out of concern and worry for the mental health and well-being of students, especially those with pre-existing struggles in school. Learning conditions have given rise to a number of concerns about student achievement — that students will fall behind academically, which will cause a domino effect as students transition from grade to grade. More importantly, educators and researchers are concerned about the impact of COVID-era schooling on students' well-being and mental health. Early research findings suggest these worries are warranted, as student reports of anxiety, sadness, and loneliness have been noted. These concerns are inescapably linked to student achievement, are disproportionately affecting systemically disadvantaged groups, and will continue to require strategic intervention and support well into the post-pandemic period.



Zhao (2021) recommends that return-to-school plans prioritize “meeting students where they are” (p. 4) and attending to all educational outcomes such as curiosity, adaptability, independence and resilience. This approach will allow attention and resources to address pressing concerns about the widening gaps between students from have and have-not communities.

What should we do about what we know?

Any future action taken will be informed by short- and longer-term goals developed in light of emerging evidence. Effects of the pandemic will continue to accumulate until the pandemic abates, and for some time thereafter, so high-stakes priorities and plans must be developed and communicated now to restore confidence in public education with all stakeholders. Such priorities include:

1. Attend to the mental health of all students.

- A strong focus on mental health and well-being must be an essential part of a re-imagined education system, certainly in the near term as staff and students enter into a pandemic recovery phase, but also as an ongoing component of the school experience. Consistent messaging and programming that prioritizes wellness and hope as part of everyday school life is an essential element for the future of education.
- School itself is a powerful intervention for enhancing student mental health and well-being. At its best, the classroom experience provides a wealth of protective influences that can bolster student mental health. Welcoming and identity-affirming classrooms that foster a strong sense of belonging and support, stable and predictable routines, daily physical activities and mental health moments, and opportunities for caring relationships with peers and adults all contribute to good student mental health. For most students, this is all they will need to recover socially and emotionally from the pandemic and to ignite their readiness to engage in learning. To ensure successful transitions back to in-person learning, educators will need thoughtful, iterative professional learning that effectively prioritizes student mental health and wellness into their daily practice.
- Every student and COVID-19 story are unique and will require differentiated support for re-engagement and mental wellness. Some students will need more than daily mental health promotion in the classroom in coming months. There are three broad groups of students who will require more intentional, targeted supports: those disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, those with pre-existing or escalating mental health concerns, and those who have been disconnected from school, or marginally engaged, during the pandemic.
- Student wellness is mediated, in part, through adult wellness. School and system staff and parents/guardians and families have experienced the strain of the pandemic and have been on the frontlines of care for months upon months. They too need time to recover and refresh.
- A gradual return to modest learning expectations for students and demands on parents/guardians related to academic progress must be a thoughtful part of post-pandemic transition planning. Student learning has continued throughout the pandemic and should be valued and connected to curriculum expectations. Specific to students' developmental stage, focused attention to prioritizing learning conditions that promote students' sense of confidence and belonging will better position students and parents/guardians to embrace the academic learning goals that lay ahead.
- With support, educators are well-positioned for early identification, noticing when a student may be showing changes in their emotions or behaviours that could indicate a concern, and an initial step in linking with school mental health professionals who can provide early intervention, or with community mental health agencies who provide more intensive treatment.

- Schools are part of a wider system of care when it comes to supporting student mental health and well-being. Our main role relates to mental health promotion, early identification, and prevention/early intervention services. We need to continue to work closely with community and health partners to ensure a robust system that wraps around students and their families.

How can we enhance our efforts to welcome and support students and families as they transition to the 2021-2022 school year and beyond?

2. Explore the expansion of online learning opportunities.

- Remote learning during the pandemic has resulted in both positive and negative outcomes.
 - » On one hand, most K-12 students and teachers have been able to adapt to a learning platform previously reserved as an option for older students. For some students, online learning has emerged as a preferred alternate platform for meeting some curriculum expectations.
 - » On the other hand, reduced in-person learning has proven very challenging for some students based on age, developmental stage, and individual learning preferences.

In either case, the technology needed for successful online learning is currently not available for many students due to cost and infrastructure challenges. Support for sustainable, equitable access to online learning is necessary for all students to have the same ability and

choice to fully and meaningfully engage in this learning option.

- Curate and share resources and pedagogical practices (instruction, assessment, task development, multiple demonstrations of learning) shown to enhance teacher-facilitated online learning.
- Continue to build on and expand school board/consortia-focused professional learning about effective online learning pedagogies.
- Rethink the value of learning technology devices compared to traditional consumable learning resources (e.g., textbooks).
- Review related regulations, e.g., school attendance, in order to enable flexibility of online learning opportunities in various contexts.
- Review infrastructure requirements in order to accommodate the implications of online learning formats for students and teachers

How can we ensure that any expansion of online learning options for students appropriately supports their social, emotional and academic development?

How can school board technology budget plans be reconfigured to work towards 1:1 access to learning devices for home and school use?

3. Study the possible continuation of regulatory changes and innovative administrative practices adopted during the pandemic.

- Many administrative practices were altered in response to the pandemic. Over time, some of these changes have shown positive impacts as they increased flexibility and efficiency for students, parents/guardians and administrators. For example:
 - » Secondary school timetables — many educators and students have reported that quad-mesters and other reconfigurations to traditional semesters have been beneficial. They concentrate learning time, reduce scheduling conflicts, and for some curriculum, facilitate improved pedagogy and learning outcomes.
 - » Pedagogy — remote learning formats have reinforced the call for instruction and assessment to be responsive to students' learning needs and circumstances. Promising student outcomes have sparked renewed discussion regarding topics such as the fundamentals of assessment, authentic learning tasks, and the value of course examinations and EQAO, among others.
 - » Meetings with parents/guardians and school staff. Virtual meetings have allowed parents/guardians, outside professionals, and school board support personnel to participate in decision-making meetings (e.g., Identification, Placement and Review Committee Meetings [IPRCs]) without having to travel to traditional meeting venues. This flexibility has increased parent involvement, minimized disruptions, and optimized everyone's use of time.

- » School Board meetings have experienced greater community engagement due to reduction in travel time.

Can you provide examples of innovative administrative practices that have emerged during the pandemic that exemplify effective pedagogy in online and in-person learning environments?

4. Monitor outcomes of new approaches.

- As with any innovation, it is important to monitor its effects. While the pandemic has identified opportunities to review traditional approaches to public education that improve the learning conditions for student achievement and well-being, a plan to monitor the effects of such actions will provide innovators with the evidence needed to demonstrate progress, improvement and modify approaches.

What do we still need to find out?

The following critical questions remain:

1. What innovations in pedagogy, administrative practice, and community engagement have schools already undertaken during the pandemic that will/should continue post-pandemic?
2. What plans are under development to re-engage students/communities most disaffected by COVID-19?
3. According to students, who has profited by remote learning, who has not, and what key factors have contributed to these outcomes?
4. What innovations in online learning have been developed to support experiential learning, and to engage students requiring special education supports/programs as well as students learning English and French as additional languages?

School itself is a powerful intervention for enhancing student mental health and well-being. At its best, the classroom experience provides a wealth of protective influences that can bolster student mental health.



What could school look like in the years beyond COVID-19?

School cultures that:

- Balance curricular expectations with an integrated focus on mental health and well-being.
- Take responsibility for addressing inequitable student outcomes.
- Anchor student learning in community schools.
- Continue to implement measurable school improvement plans grounded in a balance of self-directed, collaboratively planned, and mandated professional learning.
- Increase and value outdoor education and land-based⁴ learning opportunities.
- Value and recognize learning skills that develop within communities outside of the classroom.
- Personalize student support by shaping instruction and expectations to the specific and articulated needs of communities informed by students' lived realities that impact their schooling experience and outcomes.
- Enable and implement variations of online learning for a wider range of students.

Responsive Pedagogies that:

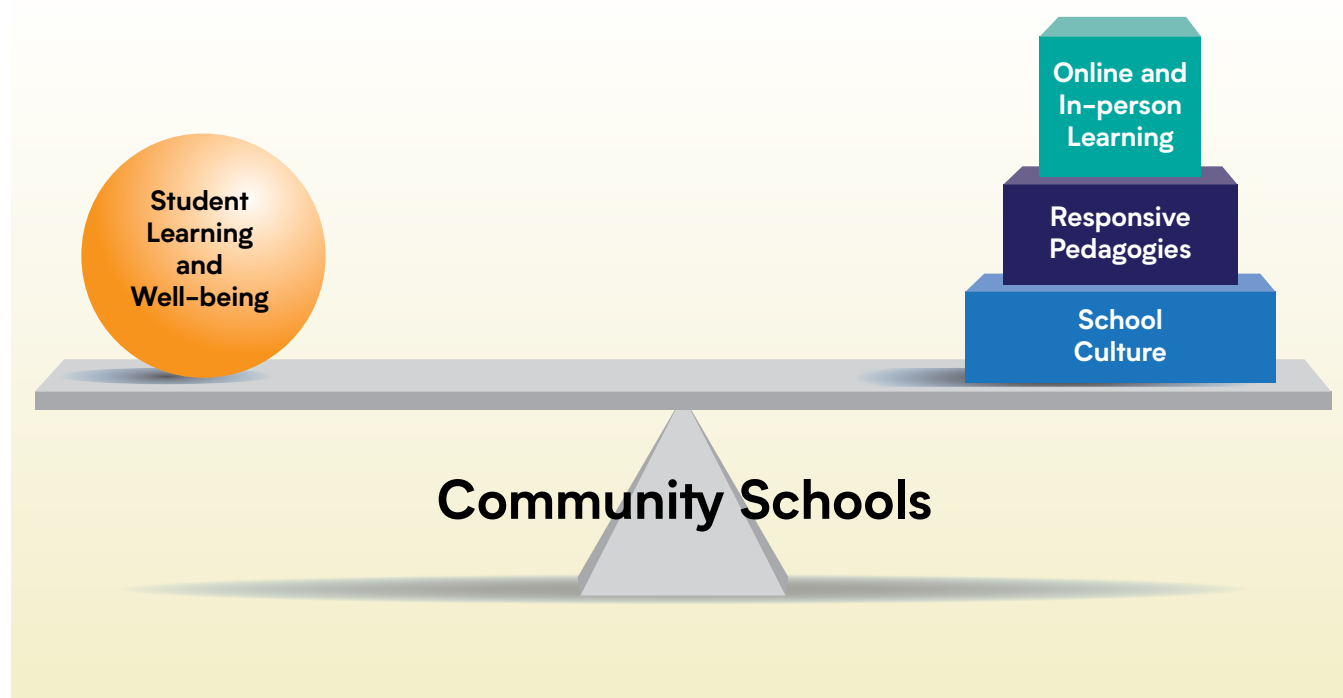
- Provide students with choice, pathway options, and flexibility based on their personal needs.
- Are grounded in an equity, anti-oppression, and social justice stance.
- Promote learning outdoors, land-based learning and experiential learning.
- Focus on student inquiry that facilitates authentic learning and assessment of overall expectations.
- Optimizes student engagement and curiosity in person and while using technology as a vehicle for learning and teaching.

Learning formats that:

- Allow flexibility in restructuring the school day.
- Include models of blended learning (online and in-person) across the curriculum.
- Allow flexible learning groupings based on factors other than chronological age.
- Facilitate self-paced learning pathways that respond to students' individual interests and aspirations.

⁴ "Land-based education assumes an environmental approach to learning that recognizes the deep connection and relationship of Indigenous peoples to the Land. It seeks to offer education pertaining to the Land that is grounded within Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy." (Boon, J. (2018). OISE WordPress)

Striking the Right Balance to Optimize Student Learning, Engagement and Well-being



School culture and responsive pedagogy have always been foundational to student success. With the Internet came new learning choices; school boards embraced this opportunity and moved to create and grow e-Learning options to provide greater flexibility and choice for students. Emergency remote learning, however, created an unsettling disparity between those able to profit by this learning format, and those who experienced negative social, emotional and academic challenges when unable to attend school in-person. The transition to school post-COVID will require a concentrated, collaborative effort to strike the right balance between all elements known to support student achievement and well-being.

This discussion paper has identified issues, challenges, opportunities and key considerations that have been revealed as a result of the emergency adjustments made to learning and teaching conditions during COVID-19. Areas of further study have been identified to ensure that the full implications of the pandemic on student achievement and well-being are more fully understood before permanent policy decisions are legislated. What should be preserved, mitigated or discontinued needs further evidence-informed, collaborative discussion with education partners to ensure that we are collectively making the best possible decisions for students now and into the future.

Next Steps

OPSBA looks forward to engaging with education partners to examine how the experience of emergency remote learning has informed and sharpened our focus and understanding of children and youth development, including the need for socialization, recreation and mental wellness. Using evidence-based research, it is hoped that collaboratively we can explore the possibilities to reframe and reimagine learning and teaching in Ontario schools and how it can be effectively supported.



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Transitioning from the COVID-19 School Experience – OPSBA Advisory Committee Members

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Superintendent of Education
York Region DSB

Laina Andrews

Superintendent of Human
Resources
Hastings and Prince Edward DSB

Patrice Barnes

Trustee and OPSBA Education
Program Work Team Vice-Chair
Durham DSB

Stephen Blok

Superintendent of Education,
Program Services
Renfrew County DSB

Shirley Chan

Executive Superintendent,
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Toronto DSB

Mahek Dhaliwal

Ontario Student Trustees'
Association
Thames Valley DSB

Prince Duah

Superintendent of Instruction
Ottawa-Carleton DSB

Lesleigh Dye

Director of Education
DSB Ontario North East

Erin Elmhurst

Acting Superintendent of
Education - Indigenous, Poverty
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Grand Erie DSB

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Elementary Principal
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Jeff Hillman

Superintendent of Education
Greater Essex County DSB

David Jack

Researcher

Ryan Jacobs

Indigenous Trustees' Council
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Bluewater DSB

AJ Keene

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Kathy Short

Executive Director
School Mental Health Ontario

Rosemary Stiglic

Secondary Principal
Peel DSB



Camille Williams-Taylor

Director of Education
Ottawa-Carleton DSB

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association represents English public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario, which together serve more than 1.3 million public elementary and secondary students. The Association advocates on behalf of the best interests and needs of the public school system in Ontario. OPSBA is seen as the credible voice of public education in Ontario and is routinely called on by the provincial government for input and advice on legislation and the impact of government policy directions.

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 @OPSBA
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**ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION**

Leading Education's Advocates

Ontario Public School Boards' Association

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Cathy Abraham
President

W.R. (Rusty) Hick
Executive Director

May 28, 2021

The Honourable Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario

Dear Premier:

Throughout the pandemic, the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) has been clear about our position on whether schools across the province should be open to in-person learning. We know that the Minister of Education is well aware of our Association's position on the reopening of schools, however we have taken the opportunity to share this with you following an invitation to do so from the Minister's office.

The safety of our students, staff, and school communities is, and has always been, our top priority. We know the pandemic has had an impact on the mental health and well-being of our children, and as medical experts have said, attending school in-person is crucial to the optimal development of our students. With that in mind, we must do all that is required to ensure our schools are as safe as possible for any return.

Our steadfast position has been that decisions about whether it is safe for students and staff to be in schools should be made by public health experts. We share the perspective of the many public health officials who have stated publicly that schools should be the last to close, and first to open. We know that whatever decision is made, our member school boards will continue to do their best to support students and staff through these challenging times. Should a decision be made to reopen schools, it is essential that school boards be provided with sufficient notice to enable a smooth transition back to in-person learning.

We do know that circumstances across the province have changed since mid-April when many schools shuttered. Case numbers continue to decrease while vaccination rates increase, including those for school-aged children. If deemed safe, a return to in-person learning would end school on a positive note for a year that saw many interruptions. Our schools have shown incredible creativity in finding unique learning opportunities to make things work, including outdoor classrooms, and are prepared to continue this effort. School boards would also continue to offer the choice on remote learning for those students and families who wanted that option.

We continue to support the prioritization of education workers in any vaccination plan. Vaccinating education workers ensures we are supporting their health, safety and well-being, while also minimizing absences from the workplace. This in turn will help keep students in the classroom this fall. We make the same suggestion regarding staff working in school-based child care centres, school bus drivers and any other staff connected to a local school.

As the association representing 31 English public school boards and 10 school authorities across the province, which together serve over 1.3 million students, it is crucial that we have the opportunity to provide our perspective on matters of importance in our sector, such as this.

OPSBA will continue to advocate for the conditions that support and promote student achievement and well-being. We will also work with our education partners and local public health units if and when any final decision is made.

Sincerely,



Cathy Abraham
President

CC: The Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education
Nancy Naylor, Deputy Minister
Jeff Brennan, Director of Stakeholder Relations

June 21, 2021

The Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education
Ministry of Education
315 Front Street West, 14th Floor
Toronto, ON, M7A 0B8

Dear Minister Lecce,

During this past school year, students and staff have experienced innumerable academic and social challenges due to the pandemic. Keeping students and staff as safe and healthy as possible, while maintaining our commitment to academic excellence, has been our priority. In doing this, we have been guided by the Region of Waterloo Public Health Unit as well as directives from your Ministry. One of the results has been the use of a quadmester model in secondary schools which has allowed for the cohorting of students into limited groups. This approach enables better contact tracing by public health in the event of any COVID infections within the cohort.

At a meeting on May 31, 2021, the Board of Trustees for the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) heard from our Student Trustees the negative mental health impact of the quadmester model used this past year. Student Trustees surveyed grades 7-12 students, who reported mental health concerns related to the quadmester model that was implemented this year. Overall, students shared that learning in the quadmester format is challenging due to a compressed workload, a lack of motivation, an overwhelming sensation of stress, and a learning disadvantage in comparison to non-quadmester formats. In response, Trustees approved a motion to write to you indicating our concern for the quadmester model used this past year, and asking that the Ministry of Education consider directing the use of the quadmester model as a last choice when determining the approach for the 2021-2022 school year.

We appreciate the complexity of balancing all the concerns related to controlling the pandemic, and we ask that you consider the need to support the health and well-being of students in making your decision.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joanne Weston". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "W".

Joanne Weston

Chairperson of the Board of Trustees
Waterloo Region District School Board

CC:

MPP Belinda Karahalios

MPP Laura Mae Lindo

MPP Amy Fee

MPP Michael Harris

MPP Catherine Fife

Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA)

Ontario Public School Boards

Ontario Student Trustees' Association (OSTA-AECO)

Sent by email: minister.edu@ontario.ca



51 Ardelt Avenue
Kitchener, ON N2C 2R5
T: 519-570-0003
F: 519-742-1364
wrdsb.ca



June 21, 2021

The Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education
Ministry of Education
315 Front Street West, 14th Floor
Toronto, ON, M7A 0B8

Dear Minister Lecce,

Waterloo Region District School Board's (WRDSB) Student Trustees have asked the Board of Trustees to write a letter in support of the Toronto Youth Cabinet's call for "the Province of Ontario and all 72 school boards to require free and accessible menstrual products in all publicly funded Ontario elementary and secondary schools."

At its meeting on May 31, 2021, the Board of Trustees for the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) approved the following motion to support the Student Trustees' request:

That the WRDSB write a letter to the ministry expressing our support of Toronto Youth Cabinet's call for free and accessible menstrual products in all Ontario school boards.

A 2019 report by Plan International Canada found "63% of women and girls have regularly or occasionally missed an activity because of their period and concerns about not being able to access menstrual hygiene products or proper facilities" and "almost six in ten (58 per cent) have felt the need to lie about being on their period or hide a menstrual product."

In the WRDSB, 88% of secondary schools report that period poverty currently exists in schools in Waterloo Region. Period poverty refers to having a lack of access to sanitary products due to financial constraints. It affects a person's whole life, school, work, social and community life.

Minister Lecce, we ask for your support to end period poverty and the stigma associated with menstruation and menstrual products. We ask you to promote equity and well being for all students, by providing equitable access to free menstrual products in all Ontario school boards.

Sincerely,



Joanne Weston
Chairperson of the Board of Trustees
Waterloo Region District School Board

CC:
MPP Belinda Karahalios
MPP Laura Mae Lindo

MPP Amy Fee
MPP Michael Harris
MPP Catherine Fife
Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA)
Ontario Public School Boards
Ontario Student Trustees' Association (OSTA-AECO)

Sent by email: minister.edu@ontario.ca



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wrdsb.ca





Mark Fisher, Director of Education and Secretary

2021 June 22

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
 Minister of Education
 5th Floor
 438 University Avenue
 Toronto, Ontario
 M5G 2K8

Subject: Advocating for all students across Ontario to learn the Signal for Help

Dear Minister Lecce:

On behalf of the Thames Valley District School Board of Trustees, I am writing to you to advocate for all students and educators to be taught the ***Signal for Help*** in the coming School year.

On May 11, 2021, Trustees passed the following motion:

Be it resolved that the Chair write a letter to the Minister of Education (with copy to OPSBA, OPSBA member boards, local MPPs, MPs etc.) requesting all students, educators and staff in Ontario to be taught the signal for help (palm forward and tuck thumb, trap thumb).

In 2020, the Canadian Women's Foundation, launched an online initiative to assist those experiencing gender-based violence as a result of home isolation during the pandemic. The ***Signal for Help*** is a simple hand gesture that can be visually and silently displayed during video calls to discretely alert teachers, school staff, family, friends, or colleagues that an individual needs help and that they would like someone to check in safely with them. The gesture involves facing one's palm towards the camera, tucking in one's thumb, and then folding the other fingers down to trap the thumb.

As you know, there has been a shift towards virtual learning, where video calls are relied upon to help students learn safely and stay connected. While these measures help protect individuals from COVID-19, they also present significant dangers for those living in abusive situations – particularly girls, women, and members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, all of whom have experienced a rise in violence throughout the pandemic. It is extremely difficult for those experiencing abuse to seek help in “normal” times. This difficulty has been exacerbated by the pandemic as abusers can closely monitor their whereabouts, devices, and digital communications.

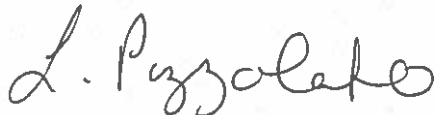
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We welcome recent financial commitments and efforts from the province to combat gender-based violence, as well as educate students about this important issue as well as consent, cyberbullying, and where to get help as part of the updated curriculum. Building on these initiatives, we strongly urge the Ministry of Education to support this important campaign by ensuring the ***Signal for Help*** is taught to both students and staff and incorporated into the curriculum. We would also strongly urge the province to ensure all staff receive education and training on gender-based violence in collaboration with local non-profit organizations who are doing valuable work in this space.

Educating staff and students about the ***Signal for Help*** at this critical time will go a long way to supporting those who have no other means of seeking help online.

We are happy to provide additional information if needed and would welcome the opportunity to work with you towards implementing ***Signal for Help*** across the province.

Sincerely,



Lori-Ann Pizzolato
Chair

LAP/sh

c: Mark Fisher, Director of Education
Trustees
Student Trustees
OPSBA and Member Boards
MPPs
MPs



Office of the Chair of the Board

June 22, 2021

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
438 University Ave, 5th Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1N3

Dear Minister Lecce:

On behalf of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, I am writing to request that benchmarks in Ontario's funding formula for public education be adjusted to provide funding for free menstrual products in all Ontario schools.

Menstrual hygiene products are a necessary support to students' health, comfort, and ability to engage fully in their learning during the school day. The changes associated with puberty make this a stressful time, affecting both psychosocial development and physiological development. The average age at the onset of menstruation continues to drop, so that larger proportions of our students are in need of access to menstrual hygiene products.

Menstrual cycles may be irregular and unpredictable, so that students arrive at school unprepared. For students living in poverty, menstrual products are often unaffordable, leading them to miss school because of their period, or to come to school inadequately supplied. In either case, these students may have to find and ask a staff member for supplies, an unacceptable expectation for a necessity which should be readily accessible and available when and where it is needed. This includes availability in all washroom facilities, taking a gender-neutral approach.

On 26 January 2021, the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board unanimously adopted a motion committing us to provide free menstrual hygiene products in all schools with students in Grades 4 to 12 and to arrange for dispensers, disposal units and other necessary elements by September 2022. At that time, it was noted that there is no specific ministry funding for this.

Minister Lecce, I submit that menstrual hygiene products are just as necessary for students in our schools as the tissues, paper towels, toilet paper, soap, and other supplies that presumably are considered in your funding calculations. Please ensure that funding benchmarks are adjusted to accommodate this additional expense.

Sincerely,

Lynn Scott
Chair, Ottawa-Carleton District School Board

cc: Nancy Naylor, Deputy Minister of Education
Cathy Abraham, President, OPSBA
W.R. (Rusty) Hick, Executive Director, OPSBA
Trustees, Ottawa-Carleton District School Board
Student Trustees, Ottawa-Carleton-District School Board
Senior Staff, Ottawa-Carleton District School Board
Corporate Records



Bluewater District School Board

351 1st Avenue North – PO Box 190
 Chesley ON N0G 1L0
 Telephone: (519) 363-2014 Fax: (519) 370-2909
 www.bwdsb.on.ca

Sent by email: stephen.lecce@pc.ola.org

June 23, 2021

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
 Minister of Education
 315 Front Street West, 14th Floor
 Toronto, Ontario M7A 0B8

Dear Minister Lecce:

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, we are reaching out to express support for the important work being done by the Toronto Youth Cabinet to address period poverty in Ontario schools. We share their concerns and request for the provincial government to fully fund feminine hygiene products in schools across Ontario.

In Bluewater District School Board, we are currently working to provide feminine hygiene products in female school washrooms and those designed for gender-neutral use. While these products have always been made available to our students upon request, we believe such items should be more widely accessible for students in washrooms to ensure privacy. Easy access to free high-quality products is fundamentally a human rights issue and crucial to student health, well-being, and success by increasing confidence, respecting dignity, reducing potential financial burden, and mitigating student absences.

We are thankful to our student senators and others in our school communities who have been longtime advocates for the prioritization of accessible feminine hygiene products in our schools. Our staff have also been working diligently and creatively to coordinate the installation of dispensers and provision of products. While we are doing everything we possibly can to accommodate this essential need, we strongly believe that ongoing provincial funding is required to ensure sustainability, promote equity, and eliminate barriers for all who must access these products.

As always, our commitment remains focused on providing a quality education for every student in a safe, accepting, and caring environment.

Sincerely,

Jane Thomson
 Chair

Jan Johnstone
 Vice-Chair

cc: Stephen Mensah, Executive Director, Toronto Youth Cabinet

/jp

Dawn Danko

Chair of the Board of Trustees

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board

20 Education Court, P.O. Box 2558

Hamilton, ON L8N 3L1

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289.775.0269

HWDSB

June 24, 2021

Hon. Stephen Lecce
 Minister of Education
 315 Front Street, 14th Floor
 Toronto, ON M7A 0B8

Re: Promoting Menstrual Equity in Ontario Schools

Dear Minister Lecce,

On behalf of our Board of Trustees, I am writing to express strong support for the Free the Flow movement, which calls on the Ministry of Education and provincial government to fund the provision of menstrual hygiene products at all publicly funded schools in an equitable and barrier-free manner.

Period poverty is a serious equity issue affecting low-income people who menstruate in Canada and around the world. Reports show 1-in-4 people struggle to buy menstrual hygiene products for themselves or their children. Through a one-time donation facilitated by the United Way of Hamilton and Halton, HWDSB previously provided menstrual products to 10 local public schools in lower-income areas in March 2020. However, a one-time donation is not enough to create long-lasting, equitable change, and a significant investment in infrastructure for product distribution is still required.

On June 14, 2021, trustees approved a motion to prepare a report to provision free menstrual products in the washrooms of all HWDSB schools in a similar manner to other sanitation products. In the past, these products have been made available to students on request; however, we believe such items should be more widely accessible for students in washrooms to ensure the privacy and dignity of students. Readily providing these products in washrooms both removes barriers faced by students and ensures students have access to products that are essential to menstrual health, comfort and participation in school and society.

Every student who menstruates should be able to focus on their education and participation in school activities without worrying about a lack of access to pads, tampons and other menstrual products. We echo the request of OSTA-AECO and other school boards for the province to establish a new fund that will allocate monies towards school to provide menstrual hygiene products equitably and free of charge for all students who menstruate.

Menstrual products are a necessity for full participation in society, and every woman, girl, trans man and gender non-binary person should have barrier-free access to the menstrual products for the benefit of both their physical and mental well-being. We hope that the Ministry will consider establishing this fund and taking this important step towards equity in our schools.

Sincerely,



Dawn Danko
 Chair, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board

Cc: Ontario Public School Boards' Association
 Chairs of all Ontario School Boards
 All Hamilton City Councillors
 All Hamilton Members of Parliament
 All Hamilton Members of Provincial Parliament