

**MARCH 11, 2022**

**WATERLOO REGION DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD**

**NOTICE OF SPECIAL MEETING**

The **Special Board Meeting** of the Waterloo Region District School Board will be held via video conference, on **Friday, March 11, 2022, at 7:00 p.m.**

**AGENDA**

**Call to Order**

**Territorial Acknowledgement and O Canada**

**Approval of Agenda**

**Declarations of Pecuniary Interest**

**Delegations\***

**Reports**

01 Response to March 9, 2022, Announcement from the Chief Medical Officer of Health

Chairperson

**Adjournment**

\*Delegations submitted after the agenda has been distributed are subject to the following WRDSB Bylaw:

13.15. The written notice of every special meeting of the Board and Committee of the Whole shall state all business to be transacted or considered. No other business shall be considered unless all the Trustees of the Board are present and agree unanimously.



# Report to Board of Trustees

March 11, 2022

**Subject: Response to March 9, 2022, Announcement from the Chief Medical Officer of Health: Lifting Health & Safety Measures in Schools**

## **Recommendation**

*That the Board of Trustees rescind the August 17, 2020 Trustee Motion to Require Masks, effective March 21, 2022, in accordance with the March 9, 2022 Ministry of Education memorandum to school boards (Appendix A).*

## **Status**

On March 9, 2022, the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health (OCMOH) announced the lifting of COVID health and safety measures in schools and subsequently the Ministry of Education released

***Ministry of Education Update: Lifting of Health and Safety Measures in Schools (Appendix A).***

In this memorandum, the Ministry of Education articulated its continued commitment to supporting a return to a more normal learning experience for students and provided an update on key health and safety measures for the remainder of the 2021-22 school year.

Based on advice from the OCMOH, and in alignment with community measures, the province is returning schools to a more normal learning environment, while maintaining protective measures – like rapid tests, ventilation improvements, screening and continued access to free PPE for students and staff.

As part of the Ministry of Education's direction to school boards, effective March 21, 2022, masks will no longer be required for students, staff and visitors in schools, school board offices and on student transportation. Eye protection for staff will also no longer be required. As some students and staff may choose to continue to wear masks or eye protection, the government will continue to provide free masks and eye protection.

The Ministry of Education acknowledged that many students and staff may choose to continue to wear masks at times, or consistently for the remainder of the school year and encouraged school boards and schools to promote respectful, welcoming and inclusive practices and communications within their school communities.

The August 17, 2020 Board of Trustee Motion to Require Masks is not in compliance with Ministry direction.

## **Background**

Since the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education has continued to provide direction and guidance to school districts. In an August 13, 2020 release, the Ministry stated “The provincial guidelines provide a baseline and school boards are encouraged to adapt them to meet local needs and support students and families.”

The Ministry thus clarified that the Ministry’s mandated requirements that students in grades 4 -12 wear a face mask was a minimum standard, and that school boards could impose more stringent requirements in response to local circumstances.

In August, 2021, the Ministry issued revised school reopening guidelines outlining the minimum requirements for school boards to allow physical attendance to resume in September, 2021. Protective strategies in the “COVID-19: Health, safety and operational guidance for schools (2021-2022)” included mandatory provisions for face masks, screening, physical distancing, hygiene protocols, and identified the importance of layering and bundling controls, and applying more restrictive measures where indicated by the local Public Health Unit. These directions were subsequently supported by Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health (OCMOH) instructions issued to school boards in September 2021 and updated in January 2022.

The Board of Trustees passed a motion on August 17, 2020 requiring staff to develop a mandatory masking policy for all students, staff and visitors as follows:

***That the Waterloo Region District School Board require masks be worn indoors for all students, staff and visitors, allowing for appropriate medical exemption; and***

***That school staff will explore alternatives such as face shields for students unable to wear masks; and***

***That staff work and approach compliance with younger students in JK-3 with compassion and a focus on education; and***

***That there be no disciplinary action for students having difficulty complying.***

### **Financial implications**

No financial implications.

### **Communications**

A comprehensive communication strategy to inform all key stakeholders of the change in approach and rationale will be shared through a variety of communication channels.

Prepared by:     jeewan chanicka, Director of Education  
                      Lila Read, Associate Director of Education  
                      in consultation with Coordinating Council

## **APPENDIX A - Ministry of Education Memorandum - March 9, 2022 Lifting of Health and Safety Measures in Schools**

**Memorandum to:** Directors of Education  
Secretary/Treasurers of School Authorities

**From:** Nancy Naylor  
Deputy Minister

**Subject:** **Ministry of Education Update: Lifting of Health and Safety Measures in Schools**

The Ministry of Education continues to be committed to supporting a return to a more normal learning experience for students. As we adapt our COVID-19 pandemic response to the evolving health environment, we are providing an update on key health and safety measures for the remainder of the 2021-22 school year.

Based on advice from the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health (OCMOH), and in alignment with community measures, the province is returning schools to a more normal learning environment, while maintaining protective measures – like rapid tests, ventilation improvements, screening and continued access to free PPE for students and staff.

### **Effective March 14, 2022:**

#### *Vaccination Disclosure Policy and Community Use of Schools*

Effective March 14, 2022, the instructions issued by the OCMOH related to vaccination disclosure policies will be revoked across all sectors.

As of this date, school boards are no longer required to have a COVID-19 vaccine disclosure policy in place and provincial requirements below will be lifted:

- Collecting proof of COVID-19 vaccinations, medical exemptions, or completion of an education program.

- Asymptomatic screening requirements for individuals who do not provide proof of full vaccination.
- Reporting vaccination coverage to the Ministry of Education.
- Reporting test usage as part of the Provincial Antigen Screening Program to the Ministry of Health, (this change is reflected in recent direction from the Ministry of Health and noted below).

Therefore, effective March 14, unvaccinated individuals covered under school board vaccination policies will no longer be required to undertake rapid antigen screening three times per week.

This change should be communicated to impacted staff/individuals.

In addition, effective March 10, 2022, the Ministry of Health is removing reporting requirements for organizations including school boards that receive free rapid antigen tests from the government through the Provincial Antigen Screening Program for the purpose of vaccination disclosure policies. School boards will no longer be required to report weekly rapid antigen test (RAT) usage to the Ministry of Health, including those who are currently using the Thrive Health app. MOH will continue to monitor program uptake using internal deployment data, which aligns with Health Canada's recent shift in reporting requirements.

The ministry has greatly appreciated your cooperation in implementing this policy in your workplaces.

As a reminder, as of March 1, 2022, all provincial proof of vaccination requirements were lifted for the Community Use of Schools, consistent with the direction for broader community and recreational settings.

**Effective March 21, 2022:**

*Masking & Staff Personal Protective Equipment*

In alignment with community masking requirements, masks will no longer be required for students, staff and visitors in schools, school board offices and on student transportation. Eye protection for staff will also no longer be required. As some students and staff may choose to continue to wear masks or eye protection, the government will continue to provide free masks and eye protection. School boards can continue to order

this optional PPE for students and staff through the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services.

In addition, we know that many students and staff may choose to continue to wear masks at times, or consistently for the remainder of the school year. We encourage school boards and schools to promote respectful, welcoming and inclusive practices and communications within their school communities.

Where staff are required to perform an Aerosol Generating Medical Procedure (AGMP) or required to be in the same room when an AGMP is being performed, N95 respirators (fit tested) will continue to be provided.

A reminder that under [current federal travel requirements](#), upon return from international travel, individuals must, wear a mask at all times when in public spaces (including schools and child care), maintain a list of all close contacts for your first 14 days in Canada, and monitor yourself for signs and symptoms of COVID-19.

### *Lifting of Cohorting and Distancing*

Cohorting and distancing will no longer be required in schools. Assigned seats and cohorting will no longer be required in student transportation. Elementary students can play and learn together across cohorts, classes and grades, both indoors and outdoors and during lunch and recess. Shared spaces, such as libraries, tech labs, theatres and music rooms can be fully utilized without distancing. Programs across grades, such as reading buddies, can return. Limitations on in-person gatherings and assemblies will also be removed; therefore, schools can plan and host in-person events (e.g., proms, graduation ceremonies, and assemblies).

Schools are encouraged to immediately move toward normal conditions within all school settings. This means that schools should plan and implement measures to allow students to congregate, including removing cohorting/zoning at recess, reconfiguring learning spaces to allow students to sit in groupings and/or circles, and to facilitate peer conversation and collaboration, both during class and lunch periods.

### *On-site Confirmation of Screening*

Daily on-site confirmation of screening for all students and staff will no longer be required. Staff and students should continue to self-screen every day before attending school using either the [COVID-19 school and child care screening tool](#), or a screening

tool designated by the local public health unit. The screening tool has been updated to align with the updated [COVID-19 Integrated Testing & Case, Contact and Outbreak Management Interim Guidance: Omicron Surge](#).

Local public health units may designate a commensurate or more restrictive screening tool for local use.

### *Short-term Remote Learning*

The ministry recognizes that these changes are significant. Moving toward normalcy is a welcome change for many and is fully supported by the Chief Medical Officer of Health. However, some students and families may find this transition challenging. School boards may receive requests for a short-term remote learning option and are asked to consider accommodating these requests within current teaching capacity in virtual learning, and in alignment with PPM 164. Remote learning packages, and/or access to broadcast grade-based resources available through TVO/TFO may be helpful to educators, students and families in supporting this transition. School boards are encouraged to identify remote learning solutions that are aligned with PPM 164.

Keeping schools open for in-person learning has been vital to supporting student mental health and well-being, which has remained a top priority. This will be further enhanced by the withdrawal of additional restrictions and return to more normalized classroom and school interactions with peers and caring adults.

## **Remaining Health and Safety Measures in Schools for the 2021-22 School Year**

### *Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette*

Appropriate hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette should continue to be promoted and integrated throughout the school day.

### *Enhanced Cleaning and Disinfecting*

Schools and school vehicles are expected to continue with enhanced cleaning protocols in place. Required critical supplies and equipment, for example, disinfectant, will continue to be provided to school boards through the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services and the government's pandemic supply chain.

### *Ventilation Measures*



Significant improvements have been made to ventilation and filtration through the implementation of various measures across all schools, including improvements to existing ventilation systems, deployment of standalone HEPA filter units and other ventilation devices, upgrades to school ventilation infrastructure, and increased transparency for students, parents and staff. Further upgrades to optimize air quality will continue through implementation of ventilation improvement measures, including deployment of up to 49,000 additional standalone HEPA filter units, building on enhanced ventilation delivered in all Ontario schools and over 73,000 HEPA filter units already delivered.

School boards are expected to continue to implement ventilation best practices outlined in [2021:B14 School Ventilation](#). This includes use of standalone HEPA filter units in occupied kindergarten classrooms and in all occupied learning spaces without mechanical ventilation.

Standalone HEPA filter units for mechanically ventilated learning spaces where the ventilation systems are not able to use MERV 13 rated filters are also being provided to school boards through the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services.

Any additional HEPA filter units should continue to be deployed by school boards in learning spaces in a manner that maximizes their benefit.

School boards are expected to continue to work with qualified persons to plan for and continue to make upgrades to improve ventilation infrastructure, where required. Projects should be prioritized to meet appropriate minimum ventilation guidelines from the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) Standard 62.1-2019.

### *Absence Reporting*

To continue ongoing monitoring of COVID-19 impacts, schools will continue to be expected to report absenteeism rates to public health units should they rise to a defined level (approximately 30% above their baseline). School boards are expected to continue to report daily on absenteeism and closures through the absence reporting tool (ART) for posting on [Ontario.ca](#) until April 14, 2022. The ministry is reviewing and monitoring absenteeism and will determine whether the collection and posting of information on [Ontario.ca](#) will extend beyond this timeline.

Schools and school boards should continue to have protocols in place to manage ill individuals while at school. As a reminder, anyone who is sick or has any new or worsening symptoms of illness should stay home until their symptoms are improving for 24 hours (or 48 hours for nausea, vomiting, and/or diarrhea) and should seek assessment from their health care provider if needed.

### *COVID-19 Funding*

While many health and safety measures are being lifted, in recognition of supports put in place by school boards, the more than \$1.6 billion in temporary COVID-19 resources confirmed in November 2021 will continue to be made available to school boards for the remainder of the 2021-22 school year, including renewal of funding for school focused nurses across local public health units.

### **COVID-19 Testing Strategy for Ontario Schools**

#### *Rapid Antigen Tests*

As you are aware, the ministry has made 3.6M rapid antigen tests (RATs) available to school boards on a bi-weekly basis. This allocation was based on providing 2 tests per student/staff at 30% of total enrolment/staff head count for schools and child care centres.

Bi-weekly shipments of RATs will continue to support **symptomatic testing only** for staff, students and children. Schools are expected to continue distributing RATs to staff and students who return from an unplanned absence.

The ministry is supportive of school boards/child care centres distributing five tests for each staff, student and child following an unplanned absence or dismissal. The total number of RATs to support this ongoing initiative will not increase. School boards/child care centres will need to manage their allocation to ensure that enough tests are available. Shipments will continue to include a mix of 5-25 tests packs. If tests received are larger than five test packs per box, schools and child care centres must continue to de-kit boxes in order to create kits with five tests. De-kitting instructions will be shared separately, as well as an updated letter to the community that can be shared with students, children and staff.

As a reminder, staff and students can also access RATs via participating community locations. Please see <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/rapid-test-locator> for specific locations.

## *Vaccination*

Vaccination remains the best defense against COVID-19, including the Omicron variant. We ask that you continue to promote COVID-19 vaccination for students, families and staff.

### **Updated Case and Contact Management Guidance**

Further to the updates mentioned above, the Ministry of Health has revised the [COVID-19 Integrated Testing & Case, Contact and Outbreak Management Interim Guidance: Omicron Surge](#), with updated guidance for close contacts in the community and in households:

- Asymptomatic individuals who are close contacts of a case or a symptomatic individual in the community are no longer required to isolate but must self-monitor for 10 days following last exposure. During the self-monitoring period, close contacts must wear a well-fitted mask in all public settings and avoid activities where they need to take off their mask (for example, playing a wind instrument in music class or playing high-contact sports).
- Asymptomatic household contacts of a case or a symptomatic individual are also not required to isolate if they are 17 or younger and [fully vaccinated](#); 18 and older and have already received their COVID-19 booster; or tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 90 days and have completed their isolation period. Asymptomatic household contacts who are not required to isolate are also required to self-monitor for 10 days following last exposure, as outlined above. Children under 5 who are asymptomatic household contacts are required to isolate for 5 days.

The [COVID-19 school and child care screening tool](#) has been updated to align with the recent changes made to federal travel requirements.

Note that the Ministry of Health has also consolidated guidance documents into the updated [COVID-19 Integrated Testing & Case, Contact and Outbreak Management Interim Guidance: Omicron Surge](#) which includes information that is applicable to schools and child care. As a result, the Ministry of Health's school and child care-specific guidance documents, [COVID-19: Interim Guidance for Schools and Child Care: Omicron Surge](#) and [COVID-19 Guidance: School Case, Contact, and Outbreak Management](#), have been discontinued.

The ministry has greatly appreciated your cooperation in implementing all the enhanced health and safety measures to support safer schools and communities since the start of the pandemic. As we begin adapting to the broader health trends while providing students with a more normal learning experience, school boards and schools are expected to actively communicate how measures are being lifted to students, families and staff within the school.

As always thank you for continued collaboration and partnership to support students and staff.

Sincerely,

Nancy Naylor

Deputy Minister

- c: Executive Director, Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario (ACÉPO)
- Executive Director, Association franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholiques (AFOCSC)
- Executive Director, Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association (OCSTA)
- Executive Director, Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA)
- Executive Director, Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE)
- Executive Director and Secretary-Treasurer, Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO)
- General Secretary, Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA)
- General Secretary, Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)
- General Secretary, Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF)
- Chair, Ontario Council of Educational Workers (OCEW)
- Chair, Education Workers' Alliance of Ontario (EWAO)
- Co-ordinator, Canadian Union of Public Employees – Ontario (CUPE-ON)
- Executive Director, Association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes (ADFO)
- Executive Director, Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario (CPCO)
- Executive Director, Ontario Principals' Council (OPC)