

## WRAPSC Meeting Minutes - November 3rd, 2020

### I. Welcome

- Heidi welcomed members of WRAPSC to the meeting, and introduced our topics for this meeting.
- Heidi explained that the meeting would be recorded, but that was not for public viewing, and that all members would be muted out of respect to our guest presenters, until the time for Q&A.
- Heidi began with a Territorial Acknowledgement
- Minutes from October 3rd, 2020 do not need approval as it was a roundtable discussion, through multiple breakout groups.

### II. Speakers

John Bryant- Director of Education for WRDSB

Lila Reid - Associate Director

Matt Gerard - Coordinating Superintendent Business Services Treasury

Michael Weinert - Human Resources

- The Coordinating Council is composed of our 4 guest speakers, who come together every week.
- March 12th - The Council found out that schools will be closed for 2 weeks following March Break. Since then, they have been working very closely with the Ministry of Education, even when schools remained closed.
- There are close to 65,000 students in the region.
- Around March 12, the Coordinating Council contacted Public Health to be prepared for the upcoming pandemic, and has since worked closely with them.
- The WRDSB continues to "Pivot" as new information is given by Public Health. This does lead to stress on staff, students and parents as information continues to change, and be recalled when new information comes to light.
- Ontario is the only province to provide 2 different teaching methods, Distance education and In-person learning. It is a question of how long this will be sustainable, with the uncertainty of what lies ahead. Parents face a huge decision when it comes what is best for their family.

**Q: How can the WRDSB support and communicate with families regarding the redistribution of classes and teachers, students opting in and out of distant learning?**

- A: Lila Reid : It has been very challenging for the province to create both modes of education
- Families were asked back in August to decide if they were opting for in-person learning or distance education for their children. A number of families struggled with the decision. In the Fall, many families changed their mind with the increase of Covid cases.
- Recently there has been a reorganization. There has been a significant amount of communication with families and teachers. It is understandable that it has been disruptive, with changes of teachers and classrooms. It has also affected the start of term for many in distance education. Communication has been key with students, parents and teachers to try and explain what the plan entails.
- Many regions are experiencing disruptions with children transferring to distance learning or in-person learning. The board is continuing to work with families to accommodate their choice in switching their education platform.

- **Not all** classrooms are not being utilized by classes, but are being utilized by distance education teachers to teach their lessons.
- If you have empty classrooms, why can't you split them and create smaller classes? This leads to needing more teachers and more resources. The board is under financial strain already with all the preventative measures put into place, including having additional staff for distance education.
- Another chance for parents to opt into physical education, or distance education, will take place in January 2021.

**Q: How are policies communicated to schools to ensure clarity?**

- A - John Bryant : Things have changed and continue to "Pivot". Principals are going into school with new information changing often. It has been difficult to coordinate the many schools with all the new information. Principals are planning based on the context of the information and making a decision based on the safety of their students. Timing and duration will differ with breaks and outside times, but all students will receive outside time. It will be dependent on the amount of students, the amount of supervision and the size of the school.
- School Councils were to start virtually at the end of October to lessen the load on the principals, as they have been working hard, including on weekends, to try and give students a smooth start to the year, working on staffing and looking at programming.

**Q: What is the WRDSB plan for filling principal positions and reducing turnover which can lead to potential community issues at school?**

- A - Michael Weinert : The process we have for administrative replacements is the same for Principals and Vice-Principals, and has remained the same.
- Based on the amount of retirements from our administrators that we currently have, throughout the year, the board opens pools in the fall, winter and again in the spring. Individuals have requirements that need to be completed in order to apply. Candidates will then be screened, and upon successful completion they will be added to a different pool that the superintendents **can** pull from for replacements. There are peaks and valleys for retirements. A number of administrators could have retired during this pandemic, but choose to stay on to help transition this school year as smooth as possible.
- Due to the two modes of education, they have increased the amount of Administrative staff needed, and have not been able to meet that amount as of yet with the amount of candidates in the pool, leading to the use of retired Administrators. Retired administrators only have a select time frame they are permitted to work, and it is not up to the individual themselves.
- Admins are moved around based on experience, skills and the needs of the school.

**Q: There is a potential perception that the WRDSB utilizing more strict measures related to Covid-19 than the Public Health advises. Why is this?**

- A - Lila Reid: What are the most important things to you? Health, safety and well-being were the most common response from staff, parents and students. WRDSB has done everything possible to ensure this.
- WRDSB is very committed to keeping the schools open, and has been working closely with Public Health.
- Whether Cohorts are dismissed or not dismissed is under the direction of Public Health, which investigates every positive case. Contact Tracking is used by Public Health in every case, and the decision is based on the outcome of that investigation.

Any dismissal is based on their findings and guidance. We may also err on the side of caution to ensure the health and safety of the students.

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- **Q: Why are distant learners not designated to schools or family of schools to help improve peer relations, scheduling etc. Why are distance learning schedules not standardized between classes and groups?**
- A -Lila Reid : Some of our schools do not have the amount of students to create a class/grouping of students specifically from that school. This leads to a mixing of students from different schools. Have established the distance learning programs in a way that really does try to provide support and specialization for teachers and students. The teachers try to develop the schedules based on the needs of the learners in their classroom, causing a variance from different grades. Teachers are given guidelines to stay and work within. Teachers are to work with parents and students on scheduling, especially when it comes to synchronize learning.
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- **Q: Is there an opportunity for the WRDSB to promote school council activities, and to ensure at least a minimal amount of engagement?**
- A - John Bryant: Absolutely. The board is able to promote school councils and also within our distance education.
- With EQAO testing - very interested in parent engagement and the increased results. One opportunity with the pandemic is to work closely through distance learning, which gives an opportunity to work with parents, and connect with students and their families. What we can take away from this experience is a lot of positive things in regards to how we look at virtual learning with students, along with in person learning.
- With Physical and distance learning in Secondary School, there have been positive results in regards to student wellbeing and learning. They are looking into the strategic plan in relation to virtual learning, allowing for more parent engagement.
- **Q: Is there any consideration for secondary school scheduling and assessing its effectiveness? Parents and students are concerned about condensed teaching of core subjects such as math. There are also concerns about Post-Secondary preparedness resulting from the current delivery model.**
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- A - Lila Reid : A survey will be conducted that consults teachers, students and families. It will happen later in November, asking for feedback on the model of learning. When we entered in Quadmester 1, there was a lot of positive feedback regarding having only 2 subjects. As it continued, the board was hearing about the stress and challenges about having some very heavy academic courses condensed within such a short period of time. The model is constantly reviewed and they have reached out to other school districts to see what they are doing. Open communication with families and students is also part of the plan. Parents and students are
- encouraged to use supports provided by the schools as needed.
- **Q: How is everything being funded? How is it being paid for?**
- A - Matthew Gerard : There have been a number of unexpected expenses coming into the 2020-2021 school year. Funding pockets have been coming in quickly over the past 4 weeks, often overlapping each other as each announcement is made. Within the last 120 days federal funding has been coming quickly, as both the provincial and federal governments are trying to support Boards in very positive ways. The lack of coordination is very challenging in regards to what it can be used for and what it means.

- PPE- using the guidelines from the Ministry of Education, Labour, Health and our Region of Waterloo Public Health, WRDSB has identified the PPE standards required to support students, and staff. It has been identified that the schools are going through the PPE at a high rate. Our Board was very clear that they were to augment student masks, making sure all students were able to have at least 5 masks, should they need it. Board anticipates spending approx \$10 million on PPE between the months of September and June.
- Distance learning has been a challenge, both logistically and staff-wise. The board anticipates spending \$9.3 million on the distance learning programming. The Ministry has provided funding, but does not cover the entire cost. They have provided approximately \$4.3 million, leaving a large gap to be covered out of the reserves.
- Cleaning and custodial services have received funding in the amount of approximately \$1.5 million. The board has been able to hire approximately 60-70 additional custodians, with positions still being filled. They have been assigned to multiple schools to assist in both cleaning measures and deep cleaning measures in classrooms/schools with suspected Covid or confirmed Covid cases. The funding also assists with the extra cleaning supplies needed to sanitize the classrooms/school.
- The funding of the increased cost has come from multiple different sources. The Ministry has provided the Board with approximately \$12.8 million to support the above initiatives along with other initiatives brought forth by the Ministry for the 2020-2021 school year. The cost of Covid 19 is approximately \$27 million for the School Board, that is an estimate. With the funding from the Ministry, the Board is spending approximately \$19.5 million of its reserve to support school reopening over the school year. Additional funding has been provided for student resources and desks. Approximately \$500 000 was spent on obtaining more desks, and Spec Ed support which has been funded by the ministry.
- John Bryant asks that any other questions be forwarded after the meeting to our WRAPSC email ([WRAPSC@gmail.com](mailto:WRAPSC@gmail.com)) and they will be answered as soon as possible.

### III. University of Waterloo research on Covid-19 and class sizes with Brendon Phillips and Chris Bauch

- The first thing that was looked at in the model was the progression of the disease.
- Everyone starts off being susceptible to Covid-19, and then when that person interacts with someone infectious, that person then becomes exposed. For a certain amount of time, these people become presymptomatic, which means they are infectious but are not showing symptoms, and after that the disease progression begins in 2 days.
- You can become symptomatically affected, which means you are showing signs and symptoms, which is where you are to isolate for 14 days, which means you are not interacting with anyone and are staying home.
- You can become asymptomatic, also known as the silent spreaders, which means you are not showing signs or symptoms and are spreading it to other people through interaction. This seems to be the most common. These people are not in isolation, and are left to just recover from the disease.
- At the end of the duration of the disease, you will be fully recovered, and are not able to be re-infected.

- The model shown during the presentation was an agent based model, which is a computer simulation with objects that are perceived as people, and all have different characteristics. They have different ages, class sizes and family sizes.
- One has adults, and one has children in different sizes.
- Children that cohabit, in this simulation can be put in 2 different classrooms. They can either keep them in the same class, or have them in separate classrooms.
- 3 samples that were being tested are:
  - In a high transmission rate of the disease, meaning people are not keeping to the safety guidelines, not a lot of sanitization, not a lot of handwashing, etc.
  - In a low transmission rate of the disease, meaning people are more cautious and sticking to the safety guidelines, sanitizing, physical distancing etc.
  - Student to teacher ratio, encompassing 7 students and 3 teachers, 8 students and 2 teachers, or 15 students and 2 teachers. There is also a primary school module with 30 students and 1 teacher per class, but this module was not covered.
- It's been reported in many other countries, that even though you have a positive case in the school, it doesn't lead to an outbreak.
- In this module, an example is 8 students per class that are assigned randomly (not with siblings), there is only a 42% of infections in school will result in a big outbreak in a high transmission scenario. In 48% of cases that were found, once there was any initial infection in the school, resulted in an outbreak. In many cases though, there was no outbreak, but for the research of this module, they were mainly looking at schools with outbreaks.
- By looking at the effective reproduction ratio, it indicates how infections this disease can be.
- If you take a school of susceptible children, and introduce 1 infected case, it is noticed that the numbers will increase as the size of class increases. This means that as the class sizes increase, so do the number of cases. If there are 15 children in a classroom, it would mean that every infected child produces 4 more infected cases. This can lead to the conclusion that larger class sizes, and random classroom assignments results in larger potential outbreaks.
- The length of the outbreaks varies. The pattern generally shows that smaller classrooms, results in shorter outbreaks. When we have 7 students per class with siblings together, the length of the outbreak is on average 23 days when everyone is being careful. If people are not being careful, the length of the outbreak increases to 25 days on average. If you double the amount of students per class, the outbreak lasts a few days longer.
- If 15 children were assigned at random, the outbreak would last, on average, 42 days if people are not being careful. If precautions are being taken, it could be shortened to 34 days. When the term outbreak is used, it means the start of the first infected child, until the recovery of the last infected child.
- In general, smaller class sizes, results in shorter outbreaks, and larger class sizes results in longer outbreaks.
- The speed of infection increases as size classes increase. In a high transmission scenario, the infection spreads at a more rapid rate as precautions are not always followed.
- Whether siblings are together or separated, the more children in a class, the higher the chance of an outbreak.

- In a high transmission scenario, 57% of infections occurred in class with a classroom size of 15 random students, compared to 39% of infections happened in the household. The classroom in this case, would be the greater site for transmission.
- Whenever a single infected case happens in the classroom, the classroom is shut down for 14 days, after which those who are not showing symptoms or are not infected are able to return to school. As the class sizes increase, the number of dates missed increases drastically. By doubling the class size, it will approximately triple the days are missed.
- With a model being done on cohorts in primary school, it is shown that alternating half the students every other week does not matter, it all comes down to class sizes and on the assumption the entire classroom will be shut down if a positive case arises.
- When we have larger class sizes, it increases the chance of a student testing positive ( or showing symptoms). It is reasonable to assume that with a classroom that has a student testing positive, there may be an asymptomatic student in the class as well.
- With some children being asymptomatic, they can bring it home and spread the disease. Sibling can then bring it into their classroom, starting the cycle all over again.
- If you would like to see Brendon Phillips, Dillion Browne, Madhur Anand, and Chris Bauch published paper, you can visit:  
<https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.08.07.20170407v2> as well as  
<https://uwaterloo.ca/math/news/large-class-sizes-during-coronavirus-pandemic-are-triple> .

#### IV. Closing with Heidi

- Next meeting will be on January 12th, 2021 at 7pm. Steering committee begins at 6 pm. Any topics or guest speakers you would like to see, please email the WRAPSC gmail account
- People for Education ([peopleforeducation.ca](http://peopleforeducation.ca)) is on November 16-18th, and is free this year, and is open for registration. It will be held virtually.