

May 22, 2020

School Closure and Distance Learning - Next Steps

Dear Parents and Guardians,

As a follow up to the email I sent you on May 19th, I am writing to provide some additional information and further clarification to help address some of the questions you or your children may have in light of Tuesday's announcement that all schools will remain closed for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.

I want to begin by assuring you that our goals during this period of school closures and distance learning continue to be focused on making sure that all of our students successfully complete this school year. At the elementary school level, we want to ensure our students are prepared to advance to the next school year. At the secondary school level, we want to ensure that all students continue to earn credits, and that Grade 12 students graduate and move on to their post-secondary destination.

Distance Learning Continues

While schools will remain closed for the remainder of the school year, teacher-led distance instruction will continue in our virtual classrooms. Our focus since the beginning of this period of extended school closure has been to keep the health and well-being of our students, families and staff at the forefront, while providing continuity of learning for our students that is flexible and accessible. During this time, many of our teachers have explored a variety of teaching strategies and formats to engage students in distance learning. All of our educators have been working hard to provide meaningful distance instruction for students and we are pleased with the progress we have made in such a short period of time. With just over 5 weeks remaining in our school year, it is important that we continue to do all we can to keep your children (our students) engaged in their learning.

Our next step is to offer a variety of synchronous and asynchronous activities and instruction to maintain engagement and enhance the distance learning experience for our students. The expectation is that all teachers will continue to adapt their practice by offering a variety of both synchronous and asynchronous strategies.

Asynchronous activities - may include pre-recorded video lessons or discussion posts for students and teachers that do not take place in real time but can be accessed at any time.

Synchronous activities - could range from weekly check-ins with students via phone or Teams meetings, to the use of activity feeds on virtual learning platforms that allow both teachers and students to post and respond to questions, “virtual” office hours to work in small groups or answer questions, to video or audio lessons.

Our educators will use their professional judgment and the knowledge of the needs of their students to determine the most appropriate form of synchronous and asynchronous activities they will undertake with their students. As a minimum, you can expect your child’s teacher(s) to provide some type of synchronous communication on a consistent, weekly basis.

The following documents provide some guidelines for parents and students to help ensure safe and effective live online learning:

- [Learning at Home – Live Online Learning Tips for Parents](#)
- [Learning at Home – Live Online Learning Tips Students](#)
- Use of Technology and Digital Citizenship - [Policy No. I-43](#) and [Procedure No. VI-62](#)

Access to Schools to Gather Personal Belongings

We know there are a number of students who left personal belongings in their lockers or classrooms. We are currently working with Halton Region Public Health on a plan that will allow students and/or parents to access our schools safely to gather any personal belongings that were left at school prior to the closure. More information will be provided as soon as a plan has been confirmed.

End of Year Celebrations

While this period of school closures due to COVID-19 has been challenging for many of our students, it has been an especially difficult time for our graduating students in Grades 8 and 12. The transition from elementary school to secondary school, and the graduation from secondary school to post-secondary pathways represent significant milestones for students, and for their families. It is a time all students, families and staff look forward to, and the last few months of the school year are typically marked with end-of-year trips, and various celebrations to commemorate their achievements.

As a school district, we are committed to ensuring that the Class of 2020 is honoured and celebrated. Every school in our district will hold some form of virtual graduation

celebration in June. Our schools are in the process of planning events to mark these special occasions and will be seeking your input on this.

Report Cards

A reminder that all elementary and secondary students (Kindergarten – Grade 12) will receive a final report card in June.

For elementary school students:

- Teachers will continue to gather evidence of student learning and provide meaningful feedback to students on their progress.
- Students will receive a June report card, including the Kindergarten Communication of Learning.
- Final grades will be based on learning up until March 13.
- Work completed after April 6 will be reviewed and may be used to increase final grades if a student demonstrates improvement.

For secondary school students:

- Final marks CANNOT go down from what they were on March 13 (or at midterm in the case of Grade 12 courses).
- Final marks on June report cards will remain the same or, if a student demonstrates improvement after March 13, marks may go up.
- Students are expected to continue to complete assigned work and be engaged in the learning, lessons and assignments. This is necessary for students to continue to improve their learning skills and to ensure they do not have gaps in knowledge when they return to school.

Summer Learning

There are a number of opportunities available to help students continue their learning over the summer. The Ministry of Education has indicated they will be releasing more details about the *Summer Learning Plan* that will include new upgrading courses for Grades 9-12 students, as well as specific learning supports for students with special education needs and mental health needs. We will share this plan with our parents as soon as it has been provided by the Ministry.

Our HCDSB Summer School Program will be offered entirely in a virtual (e-learning) format from July 6 through July 31, 2020.

- Registrations for **secondary school online credit courses** are now open, and may be accessed through our Thomas Merton Centre at: <https://merton.hcdsb.org/secondary-credits/summer-school/>

- **Literacy and Math Summer Programs** will also be offered this year for Grades 6, 7, and 8 students. More information is available at: <https://merton.hcdsb.org/youth-programs/summer-literacy-numeracy/>

We are also in the process of planning a **Virtual French Summer Camp** for HCDSB students; more information will be shared over the coming weeks.

2020-2021 School Year

The Premier indicated in the press conference and in his news release that the Ontario government will soon provide school boards with a plan for return to in-class instruction for the 2020-2021 school year. At this time, we do not know what this plan will entail. Once we have received the plan from the Ministry of Education, we will finalize our school board plan, and it will be shared with families.

Additional Information from the Ministry of Education

- [News Release – Health and Safety Top Priority as Schools Remain Closed](#)
- [Letter to Parents from Minister of Education](#)

Updates

I will continue to share important information with you directly by email. We will also keep posting updates on our school websites, as well as in the FAQ on our Learn at Home website at: <https://learnathome.hcdsb.org/faq/>

As always, I hold all of our students, families and staff in my thoughts and prayers. Please continue to follow the recommendations and advice of our [Public Health](#) professionals to keep yourselves and your families healthy and safe.



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