



Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board
Believing, Achieving, Serving

January 12, 2022

Dear Parents and Guardians,

After a two-day delay and a short-term move to remote learning, we are pleased to report that students will return to in-person learning, as scheduled, on Monday, January 17, 2022. The news was confirmed by the Education Minister today and supports our long-held belief that students benefit from in-school learning.

Staffing Challenges

As Omicron cases continue to increase in our community, the return will not be without its challenges, particularly in maintaining staff complements – an issue that is being mirrored in all sectors across the province. We recognize that as staff members are required to isolate, schools may encounter challenges in securing replacement coverage. As a result, there may be occasions when classrooms or schools are required to temporarily switch to remote learning. Should this be necessary, information will be promptly communicated to our students and families. We regret any inconvenience this may cause and wanted to alert you that there is the potential of a class or school closure with short notice.

Half-day Asynchronous Learning – Friday, January 14, 2022

In light of the return to in-person learning on Monday, January 17th, asynchronous learning will be provided to students during the afternoon of Friday, January 14th to provide teachers an opportunity to prepare their classrooms for a return to in-person learning. Students with complex special education needs who have been learning in-person this past week will be dismissed early and school transportation provided.

Remote Learning Option

Parents/guardians who choose to keep their child temporarily in remote learning should contact their child’s principal. Elementary students who remain in remote learning will be provided with asynchronous learning opportunities.

COVID-19 School Reporting

On December 30th, the provincial government announced that it would be suspending COVID-19 reporting requirements for school boards, including contact tracing, cohort/class dismissals, notification of confirmed COVID-19 cases in schools, and advisory reporting. Given the widespread transmission and inability to test all symptomatic individuals, Public Health will no longer be notifying schools of confirmed cases or dismissing cohorts/classes. Under the new [interim guidance](#), parents/guardians are also no longer required to report a positive COVID test result to the school as part of absence reporting. These changes have resulted in a significant shift in how COVID-19 cases and contact tracing will be managed. The Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board continues to explore how school reporting can be supported.

Testing / Presumption of COVID Infection

As of January 2022, publicly funded PCR confirmatory testing is available only to high-risk individuals who are symptomatic and/or at risk of severe illness from COVID-19 and workers/residents in highest risk settings, as well as vulnerable populations. To support the safe return to in-person learning, the Ministry of Education has provided take-home PCR self-collection kits for students and staff who become symptomatic while at school. These kits will be used in limited circumstances, subject to supply. We also understand that Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) will be provided for students and staff. More details will follow. Symptomatic students and staff who are unable to access testing (PCR, rapid molecular or Rapid Antigen) should presume to have COVID-19 and isolate as necessary.

COVID-19 Screening / Screening Verification

As part of its time-limited public health actions to help curb the spread of COVID-19 variants, the provincial government has updated its [COVID-19 school and child care screening website](#). The updated screening includes a more sensitive COVID-19 symptom list to reflect symptoms more commonly associated with Omicron, such as sore throat/difficulty swallowing, runny/stuffy nose, headache, extreme tiredness, muscle aches/joint pain, and nausea/vomiting and/or diarrhea. Updated testing and isolation guidelines are also reflected in the new screeners, with isolation periods of 5 and 10 days based on the student's age and vaccination status. Please be sure to screen your children daily before coming to school and follow the directions provided in the screening. Under the [new guidance](#), anyone who has symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 or is a confirmed positive case must self-isolate, regardless of vaccination status. *Flow charts on next steps for individuals who have symptoms or suspect they have COVID-19 can be found on pages 10 and 13 of the [COVID-19 Testing and Case, Contact and Outbreak Management Guidance](#).*

As an additional layer of protection for students and staff, all schools are required to reinstate daily on-site confirmation of screening for students and staff until further notice. Students (K-Grade 12) will be required to provide confirmation that they have taken and passed the daily COVID-19 school screening upon arrival at school. This confirmation of a "pass" screening result can be the green check mark from the online screening, or a parent/guardian signature on the [monthly attestation calendar](#). Rigorous screening and monitoring of symptoms by students, families, and staff is critical to limiting transmission and keeping schools safe and open for in-person learning.

Vaccination Clinics

As of Monday, January 10, 2022, all individuals in the community ages 5 to 11 can walk into select vaccine clinic locations to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. Participating vaccination clinics include LimeRidge Mall, the Centre on Barton, and the David Braley Health Sciences Centre. Community mobile clinics have also been set up in various locations to provide easy access to nearby schools. To book a vaccine and for information on available locations, hours of operation and vaccines, visit www.hamilton.ca/GetYourVaccine. The HWCDSB is working with Hamilton Public Health Services to [facilitate school-based clinics](#) for students, staff and families in the coming weeks.

The expansion of local COVID-19 vaccine capacity has been coordinated by Hamilton healthcare partners and community organizations to ensure as many Hamiltonians as possible, as quickly as possible, are protected against COVID-19 and the highly transmissible Omicron variant of concern. Vaccination continues to be our best defence in the fight against COVID-19.

As we prepare for a return to our in-person classrooms, we want to assure you of our priority on the health and safety and well-being of our staff and students. We look forward to seeing everyone on January 17th.



Patrick J. Daly
Chairperson of the Board



David Hansen
Director of Education