



Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board

Possibilities
TODAY & TOMORROW

Lucille Kyle, Chair of the Board
Sean Monteith, Director of Education

September 28, 2020

To All Students, Families and Staff:

As we near the end of September, I want to provide you with some important updates.

Overall, the return to school has been a positive experience and very successful for students, staff and families of Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board. Our schools opened on time beginning September 3, 2020 for in-person instruction and September 14, 2020 for our new K-12 Virtual School. Daily routines are now established and learning is happening.

As you may have heard, the HPEDSB is experiencing some challenges that have impacted other school boards across Ontario. While the spread and transmission of the COVID-19 virus has been extremely low in our area and is in none of our schools at this point, we still face challenges around staffing shortages in most employee groups. Thank you for your vigilance and adherence to the public health protocols in getting tested for the virus, when required.

We continue to be able to open our schools without spread or transmission; however, this has also resulted in staff absences which are concerning, and require daily monitoring by school administrators and senior staff. Please watch for updates from your child's school and HPEDSB communications for any potential impact to your child's school or individual programs in our schools.

We will continue to do our best to communicate accurately and very quickly so that families are able to stay on top of a very challenging and evolving situation.

Important transition dates

We are coming to the end of Block A/Octomester 1 on October 6, 2020. Block B/Octomester 2 begins October 8, 2020. Overall, this new approach has been successful in our secondary schools. All students and staff have adjusted to this new mode of teaching and learning.

We are noticing families changing their preference regarding conventional schooling and their children attending the virtual school (elementary and secondary) in numbers that we had not anticipated. Trying to meet everyone's needs during these ever-changing circumstances is proving to be very difficult.

Reorganizing our schools by moving staff around to accommodate students moving in and out of the virtual school creates confusion and further uncertainty. As a result, parents/guardians will have to make the decision as to whether their children will attend the virtual school or remain at in-person school for the remainder of Semester 1 ending January 28, 2021 by this **Wednesday, September 30, 2020 at 3:00 PM**. Our original plan was to allow natural transition points in the semester; however, the high number of changes has tremendous and potentially very disruptive implications for staff in all schools, including the virtual school.

I ask all parents/guardians of elementary and secondary students to consider this decision very carefully as the next transition date for movement to and from the K-12 Virtual School is the start of Semester 2 which is January 29, 2021. **The cut-off date for changes is Wednesday, January 20, 2021**. I recognize the difficulty and strain this places on families; however, attempting to manage and

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continue the functional operation of the entire HPEDSB requires a level of planning and responsiveness that is influenced by family decisions.

It is important to let you know that in the event of school closures due an outbreak, all students will have access to virtual learning (synchronous and asynchronous) through their home school.

Earlier this week Hastings Prince Edward Public Health released updated COVID-19 screening tool protocols in response to a new screening tool from the province.

Key updates include the following:

- More detailed symptom screening (see printable screening tool for complete list)
- Permission for asymptomatic housemates or siblings of symptomatic students/staff to continue to attend school while monitoring for symptoms—as long as the symptomatic individual is seeking testing/waiting for test results
- Permission for students/staff who have received a negative COVID-19 test result to return to school 24 hours after symptoms have started to improve
- Requirements for 14 days of isolation for students/staff who choose not to be tested, as well as siblings/housemates, unless all of the following apply:
 - a health-care provider has diagnosed the student/staff with another illness, AND
 - the student/staff does not have a fever (without using medication), AND
 - it has been at least 24 hours since symptoms started (48 hours if symptoms included vomiting and diarrhea)

Here is a link to the updated screening tool that was released by the province: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/school-screening/>. Paper copies can be requested from your child's school.

In closing, I want to acknowledge the incredible and heroic work of all of you. The HPEDSB has had one of the most successful start-ups of any school board in Ontario; it has been well-earned and for good reason. Like all of you, and as parent myself, I am watching events across the province, concerned but also hopeful for the future.

As the Director of Education, it continues to be my responsibility to ensure that all required actions and efforts needed to keep our schools open will be taken until the potential time that it is simply no longer feasible. Communication is critical and we will continue to do our absolute best to ensure we are communicating with you as quickly as possible.

Take care and stay positive.

Sincerely,

Sean Monteith
Director of Education