



## Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board

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

Possibilities  
TODAY & TOMORROW

October 2, 2020

### **Re: HPEDSB Schools, COVID 19 and Reorganization of Staff and Classrooms**

Dear Students, Parents/Guardians, Families and Staff:

I am sending you for the second time this week a formal letter from myself as the Director of Education to all of you. I feel that despite it being a Friday afternoon, and not admittedly the most optimal time for a system message, the circumstances and reality of our challenges require us to do so. Like all of you I continue to watch the impact of COVID-19 incident rates of virus spread around the country and Ontario. We continue to be very fortunate to not have an outbreak or a single case at this time in any one of our schools.

However, we know that many parents are concerned about the future; as a Father myself I am concerned about the future. And so the decisions we make and the implications of every difficult action we are required to take are thoughtful and analyzed over and over, and as many times as necessary until we come to the best conclusion we can.

The first five weeks of school have been remarkably successful given the challenges and realities we face. We have also created and operated a virtual school serving approximately 1750 students (kindergarten to grade 12), and hired and put in place teachers, administrators, support staff and technical support to best meet the needs of these students. This week we learned from our Families that an additional approximately 750 students will join the virtual school cohort, bringing the total enrolment to approximately 2500 students. This makes the HPEDSB Virtual School our largest school in the district.

Unfortunately, this also means that 2500 students we were expecting to be in our conventional physical schools are no longer there. This has implications for every classroom in every school across the entire school board. We know that we are required to staff more teachers and support for the additional students in the virtual school, and we know that we have a significantly less number of students in our physical schools than we were planning for before the pandemic. Therefore, we will be required to reorganize our schools by reducing the number of staff in our physical schools because of the enrolment decline, and adding more staff to the virtual school environment to support all of the students there.

Reorganization of schools and classrooms at any time is disruptive, can cause confusion, and in my experience is upsetting for students and staff alike. Having to complete a reorganization into a school year such as this, and as a direct result of a pandemic is even more challenging. Over the next few days administration in schools and staff will be informed of what this reorganization looks like, and what the impact will be for everyone.

It is important for me to share with all of you as Families, that making such decisions have not been done indiscriminately, callously and without careful thought. We have approached this unprecedented challenge with absolute empathy and compassion for our Families, staff and children. While my Senior Team and I have worked diligently in preparing for this, now knowing the wishes of our families, this responsibility ultimately rests with me. In over 25 years in education in Ontario, I can share with sincerity I have never had to face such difficult decisions as these, knowing that these decisions impact lives: the lives of children and staff.



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We will not be doing another reorganization and review of our classrooms until January when the end of the secondary school semester would normally occur, and the end of the elementary term would annually arrive.

To our Families and parents/guardians, I ask for your understanding and your ongoing support for our teachers and staff.

To our Staff, I ask for your patience and belief that we have made the best decisions possible under incredibly trying circumstances.

And to our Students, I ask you to remain hopeful knowing that we always consider the impact on you as children and learners first.

I wish you all well, and ask to you collectively remain positive, kind and resilient.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sean Monteith".

Sean Monteith  
Director of Education