



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

March 27, 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians,

We hope and pray that you and your families are well and safe during this global pandemic and continue to remain strong amid the many challenges currently facing our Catholic school system, community, country and world.

As we conclude the first week of the government mandated school closure, we are writing to provide you with an update on how the HWCDSB will continue to support our students and their families during an extended school shutdown. At a news conference earlier this week, Premier Ford announced that schools will not be reopening on April 6 as previously planned. We expect more details will be forthcoming and will share them with you as soon as we know more.

Over the past two weeks, the HWCDSB's instructional and curriculum teams have developed a number of ["in house" online activities and learning resources](#) in our ongoing commitment to support continuity in learning during this shutdown period. Also this week, the Ministry of Education launched its [Learn at Home](#) online portal to enable students to continue learning while away from school. The learning supports, which align with the Ontario curricula K-12, constitute Phase 1 of the provincial government's Distance Learning initiative. These resources are interim supports as the HWCDSB, in consultation with our employee groups, prepares for the next phase of distance learning, which shifts from parent-supported to teacher and educator supported learning.

With this goal in mind, the board is working to support our teachers in having the tools and capabilities to connect with and teach their students in a non-traditional learning environment. We are currently working on developing teaching and learning opportunities that focus on the priority areas of math and literacy learning, daily physical activity and faith. Here again, the myClass LMS will be the means best positioned to support distance learning for students. For Grade 12 students and their families, we continue to be in conversation with the Ministry of Education regarding graduation requirements. In a March 22, 2020 letter to parents, Education Minister Stephen Lecce stressed that no graduating student will have his or her ability to graduate impacted by the two-week closure and the COVID-19 developments.

The board is also looking at other strategies to support students with diverse learning needs, including the deployment of digital devices to ensure that students who may not have the necessary tools and technologies at home are able to access these online resources. We are hoping to identify these students through classroom teachers and through a parent survey which you will receive via SchoolMessenger in the next couple of days.

We understand that this is an unprecedented time in education in the HWCDSB and while the goal of returning to teacher and educator supported learning for students during this closure period is a daunting

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task, it is also a reasonable expectation. We know that the ultimate pathway will likely be imperfect and will certainly not offer the depth of instruction that is provided daily in a face-to-face setting in our schools. However, with the ingenuity, creativity and expertise of staff across the system, student learning will continue and new ways of teaching and learning will be revealed.

Recognizing the importance of prayer, especially during a time of crisis, we are also looking at ways to provide spiritual support for staff and families.

“In these days of trial, while humanity trembles because of the pandemic’s menace, I would like to propose to all Christians to unite their voices to Heaven,” Pope Francis has urged the faithful. Although churches are closed to the public due to the spread of COVID-19, many of our parishes have reached out to their families through social media and streaming services. A list of Hamilton parishes is attached to this letter; we invite you to connect online and experience the healing bond of faith communities.

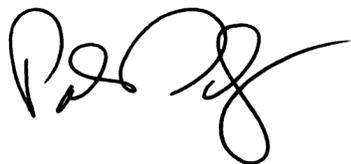
The health, safety and well-being of our students and staff continues to a priority focus for the HWCDSB. A number of resources have been posted online, including important information from Hamilton Public Health Services on staying safe during the pandemic and preventing the spread of COVID-19. We urge you to continue to follow the advice of our health professionals. Information and links are posted on the [HWCDSB website](#).

Our schools and administrative buildings remain closed to students and, as of March 24, 2020, to all non-essential staff. This closure extends to childcare centres, community use of school permits and third-party rentals. Athletic facilities and playgrounds are also closed during this time as part of the community’s COVID containment efforts. The board has additionally taken the precaution of cancelling school trips and excursions until the end of the school year. Refunds will be returned to families.

The HWCDSB is also working on processing refunds for other pre-paid services (e.g. pizza lunches); these will be reimbursed 100% over the coming weeks.

Despite the challenges of the times, we are comforted by God’s many graces and blessings. “Lift up your hearts,” a message we say every Sunday at mass, is precisely what we must do now, wrote Bishop Crosby in his Lenten letter. “During this time of trial, give thanks for the blessings we experience – the love of family and friends, the courage of healthcare and public health professionals, the availability of necessities to help us remain healthy, the bravery of those who are in quarantine or self-isolating, the awareness that we will get to the other side of this test and gather once again to sing and pray our thanksgiving together!”

Until such time, stay safe, keep well and God bless.



Patrick J. Daly
Chairperson of the Board



David Hansen
Director of Education