



April 16, 2021

Dear Parents / Guardians:

Thank you for your ongoing patience and understanding during this very difficult time in our province and region. As you know, the health situation continues to evolve quickly, and the Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board (HSCDSB) is responding accordingly.

In an effort to reduce confusion, we offer the following review:

- **Thursday, April 1, 2021** – As a result of an alarming surge in case numbers in Ontario, Premier Doug Ford activated a four-week provincewide “emergency brake” that began on Saturday, April 3 at 12:01 a.m. This emergency brake limited or prohibited indoor congregation in most settings. Schools were directed to remain open for in-person learning, unless local public health units otherwise advised them.
- **Wednesday, April 7, 2021** – The province of Ontario declared a third provincial emergency and announced that a provincewide stay-at-home order would take effect on Thursday, April 8 at 12:01 a.m. This order significantly restricted the activities of businesses and individuals, so that the spread of the virus could be contained. Later that same day, the Ministry of Education confirmed that spring break would occur from April 12 – 16. Schools were directed to remain open for in-person learning, except in those areas where local public health units provided different advice. In addition, the Ministry of Education confirmed that schools would reopen for in-person learning on Monday, April 19.
- **Friday, April 9, 2021** – HSCDSB sent all families a letter providing the information the ministry communicated to all boards on April 7. This letter outlined details about the reopening of schools for in-person learning on April 19, asymptomatic testing, various health and safety precautions, and educational resources that could be used to support student learning during the spring break.
- **Monday, April 12, 2021** – In response to a dramatic increase in COVID-19 cases, particularly those involving variants of concern (VOCs), the province announced that **all elementary and secondary schools in Ontario would move to remote learning indefinitely, as of Monday, April 19**. This same announcement also clarified that childcare centres would stay open for children too young to attend school, that before and after school programs for school-aged children would close,

and that students with special needs unable to learn remotely would be able to attend school in person beginning April 19.

We recognize that many announcements have come your way lately, and we want to assure you that HSCDSB will continue to support you as best as we possibly can. With this in mind:

- **Remote Learning** – In order to ensure that all students have equal access to remote learning opportunities, **synchronous learning will begin on Tuesday, April 20 in all schools except those already learning remotely.** For further clarity, on Monday, April 19, only students who attend Holy Angels Virtual Academy, Holy Trinity Catholic Virtual Academy, Sacred Heart in Espanola, St. Mary in Massey, and St. Mary's College in Sault Ste. Marie will continue to engage in synchronous, remote learning. Students in all other schools in our board will begin their synchronous remote learning on Tuesday, April 20. In the meantime, we encourage students who have devices to continue accessing the many asynchronous educational resources available (e.g., TVO Learn, TVO's Independent Learning Centre, Mathify, Eureka!).
- **Exemptions to Remote Learning** – As explained in my letter of December 23, 2020, remote learning involves students in Kindergarten participating in 180 minutes and students in Grades 1 – 12 participating in 225 minutes of synchronous (i.e., real time) learning every day from home. Students will thus need access to a reliable Internet connection and a digital device in order to participate in their classes. Should you wish to have your child exempted from synchronous learning, please contact your local school via voicemail, email, or other means as soon as possible to make arrangements for asynchronous learning to occur instead. Please note that, since all schools are closed until Monday, April 19, you are unlikely to be contacted until that day.
- **Chromebooks** – If your child requires access to a Chromebook in order to participate in remote learning next week and beyond, please contact your local school via voicemail, email, or other means to make arrangements for this to occur. Since schools are closed until Monday, April 19, pick-up opportunities will not occur before that date. Beyond this, please expect your local school to provide additional details about where and how to access virtual learning opportunities next week and beyond. In addition, if Internet access is an issue for your family, please convey this to your local school, so that we can explore alternative solutions.
- **In-School Support for Some Students** – The Ministry of Education has clearly indicated that all school boards must make provisions for in-person support for the most vulnerable students with special education needs who cannot be accommodated through remote learning based on student needs. With that in mind,

families who have children who meet these criteria have already been contacted individually to ensure a plan is in place for them to return to school safely on **Tuesday, April 20.**

We recognize that, with so much happening on the health and education front, many students and their families may be feeling extra anxious. Should you find that your child(ren) require mental health supports, please contact your local school or feel free to access the mental health resources at www.smho-smso.ca. Alternatively, students can also access around-the-clock counseling and referral services through the Kids Help Phone at 1-800-668-6868, or text CONNECT to 686868.

Finally, we urge all members of our HSCDSB community – students, families, and employees alike – to continue to do their part to prevent and limit the spread of COVID-19. This includes staying home as much as possible and adhering closely to all public health recommendations, including those listed below:

- Socialize only with members of your own household.
- Stay home and get tested if you feel ill.
- Participate in the voluntary targeted testing offered by your school board.
- Screen every day for COVID-19 symptoms before attending childcare.
- Practice good hand hygiene habits, masking, and physical distancing.
- Refer to Ontario.ca/covidresponse to learn what public health measures are in place in your community.
- Refrain from travelling, particularly out of the region.

We thank you once again for your ongoing patience, cooperation, and collaboration throughout this global pandemic. With the news of so many vaccinations now occurring in the province, we are indeed hopeful that an end to our current health crisis might occur sometime this year. In the meantime, we urge you to continue to adhere to the public health measures outlined earlier in this letter, particularly those related to travel and social gatherings. We remain grateful for the ongoing diligence and commitment to the common good that our families are exhibiting, as well as your continued prayers.

Nurturing hope,



Rose Burton Spohn
Director of Education

