



August 27, 2021

Dear Parents / Guardians:

Welcome to a brand new school year! We hope this finds you, your child(ren), and your families happy, healthy, and rejuvenated. Our board's theme for the 2021-22 school year – Rebuild, Restore, Renew Together – is an invitation to everyone to begin this new year with resilience, vigour, and energy.

As the Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board (HSCDSB) prepares to reopen its doors to welcome students back to learning, we wanted to assure you that we are taking a cautious approach to reopening that integrates the most recent guidance from the Ministry of Education and our local public health units. The information that follows is intended to provide you with some basic details about our reopening plan.

Registrations and School Selections

Registration packages are still being accepted at all of our schools. Although it is difficult to predict what direction the pandemic will take over the next several months, **it is critical that families confirm final school selections within the next week.** We want to ensure that all necessary supports and resources are in place for your child(ren) and we thank all those who have already made such selections.

Based on parental / guardians' feedback we received last spring, HSCDSB opted to offer distinctly in-person and remote learning options at the elementary level this year. This means you can choose to send your child(ren) to a brick-and-mortar school to receive dedicated, in-person instruction, or you can opt to register your child(ren) in Holy Trinity Virtual Academy to benefit from purely remote instruction that includes both asynchronous and synchronous instruction. Holy Trinity is proud to offer NSL, as well as both regular and French immersion programming for students in Kindergarten to Grade 8. This year, there will be one transition point in early February that will allow elementary students to move between in-person and remote learning.

At the secondary level, St. Mary's College and Holy Angels are also reopening to in-person learning. Students interested in virtual instruction should consult with their guidance counsellor or school administrator regarding e-learning or independent study courses.

Health and Safety Protocols

All HSCDSB schools and facilities will continue to prioritize the health and safety of students and employees in 2021-22. Our protocols include, but are not limited to:

- **Mandatory Daily Screening** – All students, employees, and essential visitors who enter our schools and board facilities must successfully complete the online school screen at <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/school-screening/>. In addition, all employees and visitors must confirm successful completion of the screen on a daily basis. We ask that you help us to keep our schools open and functioning safely by completing this screen with your child(ren) on a daily basis and abiding by the directions provided.
- **Mandatory Masking and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)** - Students in Grades 1 – 12 are expected to wear non-medical / cloth masks while in school buildings and on school buses, unless they have a medical condition or other exception that prevents them from doing so. Kindergarten students are encouraged, but not required, to wear non-medical / cloth masks while in school buildings or on school buses. School board employees will be provided with and will wear medical masks, unless a medical condition prevents them from doing so. Additional personal protective equipment (PPE), such as goggles, gloves, and face shields will be provided to employees, as required.
- **Enhanced Cleaning and Safety Measures** – Although current public health evidence suggests the risk of transmission through fomites is very low, the board will continue enhanced cleaning measures so high-touch surfaces in schools (e.g., handrails, door handles) are cleaned at least twice a day. All other surfaces will continue to be disinfected daily, as is standard procedure. Although hard-surface items, such as wooden blocks, metal vehicles, and plastic toys, will remain in use, most soft-surface materials (e.g., carpets, plush toys) will remain out of the classroom. Hand sanitizer will be available in all classrooms and common areas, and clear signage will be reinstalled (e.g., directional arrows in hallways, hand hygiene posters in washrooms). Additionally, classrooms may be equipped with other supplies, such as disinfectant wipes or sprays that permit the on-the-spot cleaning of high-touch, portable items (e.g., laptops, art supplies) that

may be used by multiple students throughout the day.

- **Physical Distancing and Class Cohorts / Groupings** – Current public health guidance indicates that, wherever possible, at least two metres of distance should be maintained between class cohorts / groupings and as much distance as possible be maintained within class cohorts / groupings. With that in mind, HSCDSB's elementary students will largely remain with their classroom cohort for the full day, including recess and lunch. Students will have direct contact with two to four teachers daily and have close or sustained contact with their cohort and any other students with whom they share regular programming (e.g., Empower Reading, FSL, NSL).

Secondary students will take up to two courses per day for 150 minutes each, for a nine-week period over four quadesters. Secondary students will have direct contact with two to four teachers daily and have close or sustained contact with their classmates / grade groupings. While cafeteria services will be made available for all secondary students, a cautious approach will be taken so that only specific grade groupings will utilize the cafeteria on any given day. High school students will be permitted and encouraged to eat in their classrooms on days when the cafeteria is off limits to them. Additional information about St. Mary's College's food services protocol will come in a separate communication from the school's administration.

- **Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette** - Health and safety information about COVID-19 will be offered to and/or reviewed with students, families, and essential visitors. Physical distancing and proper hand / respiratory hygiene will be encouraged. Class washroom and hand-cleaning breaks may be scheduled throughout the day.
- **Symptoms of Illness During the School Day** – Any person who does not pass the daily screen will not be permitted to enter a school or board facility. In the event people develop symptoms of COVID-19 during the school day, they will be immediately separated from others, until they are able to go home. Each school will be equipped with a kit containing additional PPE (e.g., gowns) for such occasions. Ill students will not be permitted to take student / public transportation home. School administrators will immediately report any suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 to their local public health unit; the board will report confirmed cases to the Ministry of Education. The board will follow all health and safety protocols provided, should an outbreak occur.

- **Visitors to Schools and Board Facilities** - Visitors to schools will largely be limited to HSCDSB employees, parish priests, and third party providers of essential services (e.g., physiotherapy, building maintenance). Schools will keep accurate records of any visitors who do come on site, including occasional / casual teachers or workers. Schools will also keep accurate documentation (e.g., seating charts, daily attendance records, bus lists, lists of children involved in before and after school programs), in the event that an outbreak occurs and the local public health unit must contact trace.
- **School Arrivals and Dismissals** – In order to keep students and employees as safe as possible, the board is asking all schools to continue following strict protocols related to dropping students off and picking students up.

As a general rule, elementary students will not be permitted to line up and/or play outdoors before the first bell of the day. Rather, when students arrive on school buses fifteen or fewer minutes before the start of the school day, they will enter the school building and go directly to their classrooms, where they will be with their classroom teacher until classes begin. In accordance with the *Education Act*, teachers will be available in their classroom for 15 minutes before the first bell of the day.

Principals and vice-principals will coordinate student dismissal in such a way that physical distancing between cohorts of students can be safely maintained. They will also avoid or limit the number of classroom teachers on morning bus duty so that these teachers can be in their classrooms before classes begin.

Parents not using and/or not eligible to use the transportation consortium's services may drop off their children 15 minutes or less before the start of the day. Parents may retrieve their children 15 minutes or more before the end of the day to prevent congestion. These students will be dismissed early and parents will be asked to remain outside the school when dropping off and retrieving their children.

- **Extracurricular Activities and Large In-Person Gatherings** – In accordance with guidance from the Ministry of Education and local public health units, the board will permit a safe and cautious return to athletics, extracurricular activities, and clubs. School administrators and coaches will receive details about how these activities may safely proceed (e.g., masking requirements, lists for contact tracing, spectator restrictions). As was the case last year, large, in-person gatherings (e.g., school-wide assemblies or liturgies) will be prohibited until further notice, except in schools where two metres of distance can be maintained

between cohorts. Virtual celebrations and smaller, in-person gatherings involving specific cohorts of students (e.g., class masses) will still be permitted.

- **Training for All Employees** - All HSCDSB employees, including casual and occasional employees, will receive detailed health and safety training / information about COVID-19 on our September 2 professional activity (PA) day.

Other Important Supports

- **Mental Health** – The board acknowledges that the global pandemic has caused significant stress for many students, families, and communities. We wish to assure you that our board's Mental Health Lead and Special Education Department, including our student and family counsellors, are pleased to support everyone's transition back to school. Although we know many students are very much looking forward to seeing old friends and making new ones, we also know that change can provoke a variety of emotions. We encourage you to contact your local school if you or your children are struggling with returning to school. Mental health and well-being will be a topic of significant focus in our initial professional activity days.
- **Learning Loss** – The board also acknowledges that, for various reasons, some students found it difficult to learn or concentrate on their studies. For this reason, our employees will be spending a good portion of the initial professional activity days focusing on addressing students' learning loss. We look forward to working with you and your child(ren) on addressing areas of academic concern throughout this school year. Our board's Curriculum and Special Education Departments will be returning to in-person support of teachers, students, administrators and/or families this year.
- **Staggered Starts for Kindergarten and Holy Trinity Students** – Although the vast majority of our students will begin school on **Thursday, September 9**, there are two groups of students who may be starting school at a slightly different time. Individual school principals will be in touch with parents of kindergarten students about their safe transition to school. Equally, students attending Holy Trinity Virtual Academy will be receiving additional information from the school regarding a staggered start-up, which will allow families to obtain usernames, passwords, and technology devices before remote instruction begins.

We trust that the information we provided in this letter will prove helpful to you as you prepare for the school year. Should you have any questions not addressed in this letter, please feel free to contact your child's school principal or vice-principal. As always, please continue to check the news section of our board website (www.hscdsb.on.ca) as well for important announcements and updates.

Thank you, as always, for your continued cooperation and support. We wish all of you a rejuvenating rest of the summer, and thank you for your ongoing diligence, commitment to the common good, and prayers for everyone's protection.

Yours in Catholic education,



Rose Burton Spohn
Director of Education