



January 14, 2022

Dear Parents / Guardians:

I hope this finds you and your family as well as can be at this challenging time. This letter is intended to provide you with additional details about your child(ren)'s return to in-person learning.

On Wednesday, January 12, 2022, Minister of Education, Stephen Lecce, and Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Kieran Moore, confirmed that **elementary and secondary students will return to in-person learning on Monday, January 17, 2022**. Before and after school childcare programs will also reopen on this date.

The government has provided a significant amount of information about health and safety measures and protocols that are and/or will be in place next week and beyond. The links below provide significant detail about these measures:

- <https://www.ontario.ca/document/covid-19-health-safety-and-operational-guidance-schools-2021-2022>
- https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/school_childcare_guidance_omicron.pdf

For your convenience, I offer in what follows some key information from these and other materials from the Ministry of Education and/or our local public health units.

Health and Safety Measures

The health and safety of your child(ren), our employees, and our communities continue to be key priorities of the Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board (HSCDSB). For your awareness, I share some of the health and safety measures that will (continue to) be in effect once students return to in-person learning. These include, but are not limited to:

- **Daily Self-Screens** – All employees, essential visitors, and students (or their parents / guardians in cases where students cannot complete them by themselves) are required to complete, submit, and confirm their self-screening every day. Everyone is also required to abide by the guidance provided at the end of the screening tool, located at <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/school-screening/>.
- **Masks for Students** – According to guidance received from the ministry many months ago, all students from Grades 1 – 12 are required to wear masks, unless they have a medical exemption. Masking for kindergarten students is highly recommended. The Ministry of Education recently shipped many high-quality three-ply cloth masks to all school boards for students who need them. Although students may wear three-ply cloth masks, alternatively, they may also wear one-ply or two-ply cloth masks. Importantly, although students must wear masks indoors, including in the gym, there is no longer a requirement for students to wear masks outdoors.
- **Masks for Employees** – All employees are required to wear medical or non-fitted N95 masks, unless they have a medical exemption. Supplies of these masks are available in all schools and board facilities. Those with medical exemptions must adhere to the detailed protocol related to distancing and other factors.
- **Eye Protection and Additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for Employees** – School-based employees are now required to wear eye protection any time they are inside the school and interacting with others, unless they are behind an impermeable barrier. Outside, eye protection is required of school-based employees if they come within two metres of an unmasked individual. Eye protection (e.g., goggles, faceshields, safety glasses) is available at no cost to all employees. In addition, the board also provides gowns, gloves, and other items to specific employees who require them to do their work effectively.
- **Enhanced Cleaning Measures** – Our schools and board facilities continue to be cleaned with care and diligence, both by our permanent carestaff and by the additional carestaff who work the COVID-19 shift. Caretakers on the COVID-19 shift focus on frequently sanitizing high-touch surfaces, such as door handles,

stair railings, countertops, desktops, and student and staff washrooms. This shift will continue to remain in place until further notice.

- **Attestations and Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs)** – All employees and frequent visitors to our schools and board facilities have been required to attest to their vaccination status. Individuals who are deemed not to be fully vaccinated must complete and submit a negative RAT three times a week.
- **Ventilation** – Ventilation remains a key factor in mitigating the transmission of COVID-19. Most schools in the HSCDSB are outfitted with modern ventilation systems that have effective filters and the capacity to increase air flow considerably. Additionally, HEPA filtration units have been placed in all classrooms and other school spaces (e.g., library, offices) not equipped with ventilation systems to filter potentially harmful particles. HEPA units have also been placed in already ventilated areas, such as kindergarten rooms, classrooms with high enrolment, and smaller counselling rooms, in order to provide an additional level of protection.
- **Hand Washing and Sanitization** – Regular hand washing and sanitization remains a key factor in preventing the spread of illness. Hand sanitizer is freely available throughout all schools and board buildings and our washrooms have a reliable supply of soap. Students will continue to have the opportunity to cleanse their hands regularly throughout the school day.
- **Distancing** – Maintaining as much distance as possible between people is a key health and safety strategy, with a particular focus on maintaining at least two metres between cohorts. Our schools all post signage that promotes a safe distance between people (e.g., decals on the floor, signs on doors).
- **Strict Cohorting** – One of the most important measures that the board will continue to implement is the strict cohorting of students at such times as lunch, recess, and outdoor breaks. HSCDSB will continue to advocate that students from different cohorts do not congregate in hallways, gyms, cafeterias, or other spaces. Keeping students in strict cohorts helps to prevent transmission across classes and households.

- **Continuing the Pause on All High-Contact, High-Intensity, and High-Risk Activities** – All high-contact, high-intensity, and/or high-risk activities (e.g., playing basketball) remain paused until further notice. In addition, the Ministry of Education has temporarily paused all music-related activities (e.g., singing, playing wind instruments, choirs).
- **Vaccinations** – Vaccinations remain a key factor in mitigating the spread and/or severity of symptoms associated with COVID-19. With this in mind, and in accordance with the ministry's direction, the Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board will be collaborating with Algoma Public Health, Porcupine Public Health, and Public Health Sudbury and Districts to discuss opportunities for additional vaccine clinics before, after, and during the school day for students aged 5 to 11. **We want to assure you that students will require parental consent to participate in these clinics** and urge you to make an informed decision about having your family vaccinated.

Important Changes to Screening, Reporting, Contact Tracing, and Dismissing Cohorts

Over the past week, the government has made some significant changes to the way schools deal with information related to positive COVID-19 cases. These changes are outlined below:

- **Updated Self-Screening** – As mentioned earlier in this letter, students and employees are required to complete and confirm their self-screening on a daily basis and adhere to the guidance provided at the end of the screen. This guidance outlines if your child(ren) can attend school, if isolation is required, and/or how long the isolation period is to last.

It is important to note that, because schools are not considered to be high-risk settings, students and board employees might not be able to access PCR tests to verify if they are infected with the virus. **Individuals must therefore presume that they have COVID-19 if they fail the daily screen and have specific symptoms.** In such cases, individuals should feel free to contact their local public health unit and/or obtain medical advice.

In addition, since the Omicron variant is so widespread, families should also assume that COVID-19 may be circulating in every school.

- **Reporting Absences** – Please continue to report your child(ren)'s absences as you normally do (e.g., by phoning the school). **If your child(ren) test positive on a PCR or RAT, you are no longer required to report this information to the school**, since individuals only exposed at school with all public health measures in place (e.g., distancing, masking, screening) are not generally considered high-risk contacts. You are required, however, to follow the health guidance (e.g., isolate for a specific period of time) provided in the school screening tool.
- **Reporting, Contact Tracing, and Dismissing Cohorts** – One of the most important changes that the government has made is in the area of notifications related to COVID-positive cases in schools and workplaces. **Public health units will no longer be conducting contact tracing or dismissing classroom cohorts based on positive cases.** Individuals who either test positive for COVID-19 or experience COVID-like symptoms will need to isolate for the appropriate period of time and **directly contact their own high-risk contacts.** This means that, **as a general rule, your child(ren)'s school will not inform you that a member of a school community or classroom cohort is positive.**

School principals will, however, be required to provide regular absence reports to the Ministry of Education. They will also be required to report absences that amount to 30% or more of all students and staff in their building to their local public health units. Additional information may be found at https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/contact_mngmt/management_cases_contacts_omicron.pdf

- **Deployment of RAT Kits** - Our board anticipates receiving a significant number of RAT kits within the next week. The guidance around the use of RATs has changed. Recently, the Ministry of Education has advised that two RATs should be distributed to all in-person elementary students and all employees who come into contact with students. Our board will also receive a substantial supply of RATs for distribution to secondary students. These RATs are to be used when individuals are **symptomatic**. If two consecutive RATs, separated by 24-48

hours, are both negative, the symptomatic individual is less likely to have COVID-19 infection, and the individual should isolate until symptoms are improving for at least 24 hours (or 48 hours if gastrointestinal symptoms are present).

- **Anticipated High Rates of Absenteeism** - Given these recent changes and the high transmissibility of the Omicron variant, our board is expecting higher than average rates of staff and student absenteeism over the next little while. Although our board remains hopeful that there will be sufficient staff members available to fill all absences, **it is possible that we might need to dismiss individual classroom cohorts or close individual schools for a period of time because of staff shortages.**

Should this be necessary, we will provide you with as much advance notice as possible. In the short term, **if your family has borrowed one or more Chromebooks from the school**, please wait for additional instruction from your school.

To ensure that your child(ren) have safe places to go in the event of an unexpected classroom or school closure, please ensure that:

- Your child(ren)'s school has your most up-to-date and correct contact information.
- Your child(ren)'s school has correct emergency contact information.
- You and/or your child(ren)'s emergency contact can be reached easily (e.g., ensure your cell phone is charged, left on, and with you).

Transitioning Between In-Person and Virtual Learning

Ensuring that your child(ren) have access to safe, high-quality Catholic education is one of our board's greatest priorities. We respect the fact that, with everything that is currently happening, you might feel uneasy about sending your child(ren) back into an in-person learning environment.

The Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board is therefore extending its offer to you to transition your child between in-person and virtual learning for the remainder of the 2021-22 school year. The deadline for indicating your desire to transition your

child(ren) has been extended to noon on **Monday, January 24, 2022**. The actual transition date is **Monday, February 7, 2022**.

If you simply wish to have your child(ren) learn from home for a short period of time (e.g., a week or two), please contact your local school to make arrangements.

- **Students Currently Enrolled in Virtual Learning**

If your child(ren) are currently enrolled in Holy Trinity Virtual Academy and you wish to have them remain there until the end of the 2021-22 school year, there is nothing more you need to do. Your virtual instruction will continue.

If your child(ren) are currently enrolled in Holy Trinity Virtual Academy and you wish to have them start in-person learning on Monday, February 7 at a physical school, please contact Principal Kristen Coulter or Vice-Principal Andrea Greco at 705-945-5622 or elementaryvirtual.school@hscdsb.on.ca by noon on **Monday, January 24**.

- **Students Currently Enrolled in In-Person Learning**

If your child(ren) are currently enrolled in in-person learning at a local school and you wish to have them remain learning in person until the end of June 2022, there is nothing more you need to do. Your in-person instruction will continue.

If your child(ren) are currently enrolled in in-person learning at a local school and you wish to have them transition to Holy Trinity Virtual Academy on Monday, February 7, please contact your local principal or vice-principal by noon on **Monday, January 24** to ensure appropriate arrangements are made.

We recognize it might be difficult to make a commitment when health conditions are so unpredictable. If you feel unable to make this decision by the January 24 deadline and you express a desire to transition after that date, we will add your name to a wait list and try our best to accommodate you. However, please understand we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

In closing, please accept our board's continued appreciation for your years of cooperation and support. Although this letter attempts to address some of the most common issues and/or pressing questions you might have about our return to in-person learning, should this letter not address a specific or personal concern that you have, please contact your child(ren)'s school. I thank you for your continued adherence to public health measures, commitment to the common good, and prayers for everyone's safety.

Inviting you to rebuild, restore, and renew together,



Rose Burton Spohn
Director of Education