

COVID-19 Update

(coronavirus)



Avon Maitland
District School Board
Engage, Inspire, Innovate... Always Learning

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dear AMDSB Families,

As communities in Ontario, throughout Canada, and all over the world work to limit the spread of COVID-19, I wanted to provide an update as we return from March Break. We are dealing with an unprecedented situation and we are working very hard to keep families informed as we receive information from the Ministry of Education and our local public health partners, and make decisions that impact our own students and staff.

Although all of our staff are working remotely, our high level of commitment to our students remains the same. Our “You Matter” branding that we have been promoting throughout our schools could not be more true than now. We want students to continue their learning and ensure that they are not penalized during this pandemic response. They are the most important piece of this puzzle and we want to do everything we can to engage them academically, while also keeping them healthy. In addition, we want to ensure that all students, regardless of need, feel supported and have access to the supports that will help them continue learning.

I want to publicly thank our amazing staff for coming forward in this trying time with a positive, “how can I help” attitude. We are dealing with changes that we could have never anticipated and in light of what Premier Ford eluded to yesterday during his press conference, we are bracing for an extended school closure. This means we need to plan for administering distance education to our students and we must consider students with unique learning needs, as well as those families without reliable internet connection or available devices for all students in their household. We are working very hard to develop a plan to address these issues and will communicate this information to families as soon as possible. In the meantime, [the list of online resources](#) that our Learning and Program Services teams pulled together, along with [those announced by the Ministry of Education](#), will hopefully provide a starting point for students in the meantime.

On Monday we hosted a teleconference with our Principals and Vice Principals and they will be hosting online meetings with their staff. Teachers and support staff will begin to develop plans for a model of distance education to begin in the next two weeks. We have also asked that staff reach out to students and families in the coming days so that students and families make connection. Some schools have begun connecting with students by hosting morning announcements on social media and/or school websites. We ask that you remain patient as these systems are planned and implemented.

Here are a few additional updates since my [last letter on March 13](#):

Continued on page 2...

Updates to our COVID-19 webpage: amdsb.ca/apps/pages/COVID-19

- On Friday March 20, we added a section called “Frequently Asked Questions” to provide answers to questions regarding the school closures. If you have additional questions, please submit them to communications@ed.amdsb.ca.
- We also have links to websites that provide important updates at the local, provincial, and federal levels. We encourage you to regularly check these sites as the information and recommendations change often. There is a great deal of information about the COVID-19 pandemic so we encourage you to seek information from reputable sources.

Helping students continue learning at home:

- As mentioned above, our Learning and Program Services teams pulled together a [wide variety of online resources for students at any level](#). These resources are continually updated and refreshed.
- [The Ministry of Education announced the first phase of their “Learning at Home” portal](#).
- We are continuing to develop plans to address issues of internet or device access. We are collating a list of families who have called or emailed expressing concerns and issues and we will get back to them when we have more information. Please stay tuned for more details on how students can access physical copies of learning resources.
- For many students and parents, particularly in grade 12, there is concern about the possible loss of the school year. The Minister of Education was very clear in his letter that “no graduating student will have their ability to graduate impacted by the two-week closure and the COVID-19 developments”. We share this commitment and will prioritize this in our planning for continuity of learning.

Addressing mental health needs:

- It is normal to feel sad, distressed, worried, confused, scared or angry during a crisis. Learn more about:
 - [Coping with stress during the 2019-nCoV outbreak](#)
 - [Helping children cope with stress during the 2019-nCoV outbreak](#)
 - Remember you can reach out to [local mental health supports](#) or call [211](#).
- Our Mental Health Team has put together a newsletter for families. [Please click here to view](#).

Reminder of public health recommendations:

- Federal, provincial and local experts are all recommending [Social \(physical\) distancing](#), along with usual infection control practices (e.g. hand-washing, coughing/sneezing in a flexed elbow, staying home when ill, etc.).
- For travellers:
 - The Government of Canada has issued an official global travel advisory warning all Canadians to avoid non-essential travel outside of Canada until further notice.
 - All travellers arriving in Canada from international points are being asked to [self-isolate](#) for 14 days as a precaution.
- Local playgrounds (including those located on school properties) have been closed until further notice to help support the efforts to ensure social (physical) distancing.
- If you develop COVID-19 symptoms, use this [self-assessment](#) to help determine if you need to seek further care.

Continued on page 3...

...3

- On Tuesday, March 24, HPPH announced the following: As reported by Waterloo Region Public Health, an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19 attended an event at the Seaforth Agricultural Society on Saturday, March 14, from 9pm to March 15, 1am. Anyone who attended this event is asked to [self-monitor](#) for symptoms for 14 days from the date of the event. If you develop symptoms you should [self-isolate](#) right away (stay at home and avoid close contact with others, including others in the same household) and take the [online assessment tool](#) for further direction. See [Waterloo Region Public Health](#) for more information.
- They also announced “virtual assessment centres” for Huron and Perth counties. [Please click here for details.](#)
- Please continue to check the [Huron Perth Public Health \(HPPH\) website](#) for COVID-19 updates and recommendations.

Labour relations updates:

- All labour sanctions from OSSTF (Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation) and ETFO (Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario) have been lifted. This means that staff are able to participate in regular work, including meetings.
- ETFO arrived at a tentative agreement with the Province on Friday March 20.
- We will continue to keep our [Labour Relations webpage](#) up to date.

Other important updates:

- The Ministry of Education announced the following:
 - All EQAO assessments are cancelled for this school year.
 - [Some child care centres will be reopened to support front line health care workers.](#) We do not yet know which (if any) will be impacted in Huron and Perth.
 - [Premier Ford announced that non-essential businesses in the Province need to close.](#)

As you know, this situation is continually evolving. We are doing our very best to develop plans that will continue to put our students first. We are working with our staff to brainstorm the best ways to engage students so that their learning may continue as we try to “flatten the curve”, in the words of our public health partners. The most important thing that those of us who do not work in the areas of “essential services” as outlined by the Province, is [stay at home](#).

I have no doubt that we will get through this. Our schools will once again be filled with our bright and talented students and staff. But in the meantime, please keep your distance from others, wash your hands and help keep each other healthy and safe. [This video provides a nice summary of the importance of hand-washing \(using a classroom example\).](#)

I will continue to provide updates as this situation continues. Thank you for your patience and continued support.

Sincerely,



Dr. Lisa Walsh