Planning for Return to School in September

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PURPOSE:

1. To provide direction to staff to inform the development of models for planning for the return to school in September 2020

CONTEXT:

2. After three months of at home learning, the full-time return to school for students and staff is anxiously awaited by everyone. The Ministry of Education has guided all decisions on school operations since March and will continue to do so for the fall. On June 19th, the Ministry of Education released much anticipated guidelines regarding how schools could reopen in September. The guidelines require significant shifts in structure, design and delivery of public education to protect the health and safety of students and staff. The guidelines provide that the return to school in September is voluntary and school districts must be prepared with three scenarios for the delivery of learning and have the capacity to pivot between scenarios as required. Together, the three scenarios will allow for a staged/phased re-entry to school as health conditions allow.

    Locally, the decision for school districts is not which of the three models to implement in September, but rather how to operationalize each of the three models in terms of physical distancing, cohorting, timetabling, curricular focus, scheduling, transportation, adjustments to the school day, etcetera. Many of the provincial guidelines bump up against the provisions of collective agreements, regulatory requirements and established policies and practices. Notwithstanding that, school districts are required to develop plans within existing staff resources, within the current budget envelope and in line with existing collective agreements. The ability to develop a plan which can be put into practice requires collaboration with federations, public health, transportation authorities, and other school districts. At the OCDSB, three collaborative tables have been meeting to discuss these issues and develop strategies which are actionable, acceptable to public health, and aligned with other area districts. This work is essential to informing operational planning decisions, the fiduciary responsibilities of the Board, and the practical challenges of completing a task of this magnitude in the limited time available. Our work is

compounded by the reality that everyone wants a return to the regular school day as we have known it, although it may not be possible for this to safely happen in September.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

3. **Overview of Ministry Guidelines**
   The Ministry Guidelines (attached as Appendix A) Approach to reopening schools for the 2020-2021 school year require school boards to prepare for three scenarios:

   - normal school day routine with enhanced public health protocols;
   - modified school day routine based on smaller class sizes, cohorting and alternative day or week delivery; and
   - at-home learning with ongoing enhanced remote delivery.

   The guidelines are very prescriptive, establishing a complex framework for school operations. While school boards must plan locally, most of the local planning is not designing models, but rather applying the Ministry plan to the local context. To support school boards in preparing to re-open, the Ministry suggests that boards formulate their plan for reopening by late July. The Ministry will provide further guidance on re-opening based on the latest public health advice in early August to prepare for school opening.

4. **Moving from Challenge to Collaboration**
   From the outset, staff identified the number of limitations and challenges of these scenarios, and the need for active collaboration. In the Covid-19 update at the Board meeting of 22 June 2020 (attached as Appendix C), Director Williams-Taylor shared information about the planning and spoke about the collaborative tables have been established through the Program and Learning K-12 Department. Regular meetings which engage union partners, principals, vice principals, Learning Support Services, staff leads with responsibility for mental health, equity, school effectiveness, extended day programs and information technology were established at the outset based on the importance of many voices informing thinking. These tables have been engaged in the continuity of learning discussion throughout Learn at home and now planning for the return to school.

   A key part of that work was drawing on models and research shared by other jurisdictions in the province, nationally and internationally to develop a foundation for collaborative planning. These collaborations also include our partnership with Ottawa Public Health and the other three school boards in Ottawa. Our partnership with OCSB is particularly important as our combined planning will inform the blueprint for our shared transportation partner, OSTA.

5. **School Operations, Planning and School Day Modifications**
   Planning must ensure agility, allowing for the ability to move from one scenario to another throughout the year. Boards are encouraged to use "distancing" and

"cohorting" and to adapt delivery models to limit a typical classroom to 15 students at one time with a distance separation of 2m.

To the greatest extent possible, boards are encouraged to assign students, teachers, educational assistants and ECEs to class groupings as they would in a conventional school year, so that class groupings can be maintained despite the form of delivery that is in place at any one time. In order to reduce the number of contacts, timetabling must be structured to allow students to remain in contact with only their classmates and a single teacher for as much of the school day as possible.

The guidelines clearly identify the following implications of this approach:
- maintaining a limit of 15 or fewer students in a classroom will require alternate day or week delivery to a segment of the class at one time;
- students not in class for a day or days would need to be assigned curriculum linked work; where possible, students not in class could participate in synchronous learning with their classmates for a period of the school day;
- teachers would need to prepare lesson plans that could be delivered through alternate day or week timetables, where part of a student's timetable would be in school learning and part would be remote learning;
- a range of timetabling models could be developed to support local circumstances;
- the need to limit rotating teachers would require adaptation to the delivery of subjects such as French or Anglais, art, music, and physical education;
- students and teachers would be encouraged to remain in their classroom and to move as a cohort to entrances, exits, or other spaces within the school;
- teachers would be encouraged to establish virtual staff rooms and not congregate before arriving in, or returning to their classrooms; and
- where a large class size would not permit alternate day delivery even with cohorts of 15, boards would be encouraged to form additional classes led by specialist or untimetabled teachers.

At the secondary level, additional adaptations may be required to minimize the circulation of students and the mixing of students outside of a class cohort.

6. Safety, Cleaning and Access Restrictions

To ensure safety of students and staff, boards must ensure additional cleaning protocols are implemented, especially on frequently touched surfaces and shared resources. In addition, boards must consider the requirements for and appropriate use and disposal of personal protective equipment (PPE). The Facilities Department and Occupational Health and Safety are working together with public health to establish appropriate protocols in this regard. The ordering of additional personal protective equipment supplies is also underway.

Plans must also support general physical distancing, such as spreading students into different areas; using visual cues such as tape on the floor, corridors, bathrooms and outside areas; scheduling recess in small groups and holding physical education or other classes outdoors. Other requirements include:

- Limit parents and visitors inside the school.

- Consider using signage/marking to direct students through the steps for entry and exit of the school building.
- Minimize the number of personal belongings (e.g., backpack, clothing, sunscreen, etc.) and, if brought, asking that belongings be labeled and kept in the child's designated area.
- Develop guidance for lunches and lunch room or cafeteria areas, as well as other shared areas of schools, such as libraries and gyms.

Schools did develop experience with the implementation of this type of restriction in June when they managed the pick-up of student belongings. In terms of planning for the fall, it is anticipated that the approach to these issues will be similar to what occurred in June; there will be some general standards of practice established for the school district with local flexibility on implementation. This is necessary to accommodate for the wide range of building configurations, size and enrolment levels.

One area of particular challenge for the community will be the limited access of parents and visitors to the building. At this time, staff is researching and learning from the experiences of other jurisdictions and child care centres which have moved implemented return to school plans. This is also an area of discussion with public health authorities.

7. **Adapted Curriculum and Assessment**
Curriculum delivery may be adapted to the delivery model, but the expectation is the achievement of overall expectations across all subjects and grades. The guideline provides possible approaches to adapting curriculum delivery, for example:

Elementary	Secondary
• One teacher staying with a group of children all day, teaching all areas of the curriculum • Remote curriculum delivery while students are at home • Scheduling one period per day where a teacher links a class in school to classmates at home via synchronous learning • Rotary and specialist teachers joining classrooms via remote or smartboard devices	• Shortened periods of in-person instruction in the morning with blended online and independent learning in the afternoons. • A block schedule, with one course taught in a 6-7 week block in-person and one full-semester online course • Cohorted Grade 9 and 10 compulsory courses in person with elective courses and Grade 11 and 12 courses taught online

Report cards, including Progress Reports and the Kindergarten Initial Observation and Communication of Learning are still required, including for those who may plan to only participate through remote learning. Secondary program offerings must include all compulsory courses and support all pathways. Planning must also consider specialized programs such as SHSMs, experiential learning and OYAP; the

OCDSB has been looking at combined practical and virtual opportunities for students.

8. **Support for Students with Special Education Needs and English Language Learners**
The Ministry guidelines recognize the unique needs of special education students and school boards need to consider providing students with a high level of special education needs, for whom remote learning may be challenging, the option of attending school every day. Guidance to support students with special education needs should include:

- Considering changes in the school environment and/or remote learning needs when reviewing and updating Individual Education Plans (IEPs)
- Considering additional planning and transition time for students with special education needs to support a smoother transition to school
- Safely supporting the return of medically fragile students by consulting with local public health authorities on options for personal protective equipment (PPE), staff training, and potential continued remote learning where return is not possible
- Accommodating the needs of students who require significant personal support, including considering options for personal protective equipment for both staff and students
- Providing guidance relating to assistive technology
- Considering alternate attendance options for students depending on their needs
- Working with partners to develop local protocols for the access of non-school based providers, such as rehabilitation therapists and nursing staff, and supporting remote delivery of these services where in-school delivery is not possible

The OCDSB has a strong commitment to special education and offers a range of special education programs. The Learning Support Services Department is currently working on plans to support students with special education needs. More information about this will be available at the meeting next week.

In the case of English Language Learners, staff believe that given the size of ELD classes, it will be possible to work within the 15 student cohort and possibly offer instruction five days per week in class.

9. **Examining Ways to Put This Into Action at the OCDSB**
Planning for three learning scenarios is additionally complicated by the significant differences in the delivery of instruction in primary, junior, intermediate and secondary programs. Some additional factors of impact which require consideration at the OCDSB include:

- multiplicity of elementary program offerings;
- number of daily student transitions;
- number of teacher contacts;
- variations in school size and enrolment;
- complexity of transportation services;

- number and nature of specialized programs including special education and English Language Development classes;
- staffing model for Early Childhood Educators in regular program and Extended Day Program;

10. **Alignment with Collective Agreements and Staffing Considerations**

Like all school districts, there is a need to consider collective agreement provisions to ensure alignment. Our work with federation partners at the collaborative table has been instrumental in considering ways to best address our obligations. Examples of this at the elementary level include discussions about limits on teacher supervision; ways to ensure teachers have the required preparation time of 240 minutes per week; ways to ensure that the teachers have a scheduled 40 minute lunch break which is both a regulatory and collective agreement requirement. At the secondary level, similar issues exist.

There are other staffing considerations which are unique to the role, student needs, and/or staffing assignments. For example, secondary teachers who are employed half time might normally work one half day, but if they are assigned to teach period 1 and 2, in some delivery models this could become a full day assignment for a fixed term. Itinerant staff also require careful consideration based on the nature of their responsibilities; for some itinerant staff maintaining physical distances with students may not be as easy to realize. This is also a consideration for Educational Assistants, Early Childhood Educators, some contract teachers, and some professional services staff.

Finally, specialist teachers present slightly different considerations; they may be able to manage cohort size and/or physical distance, but a specialist gym teacher who teaches a large number of students in the school would likely exceed the appropriate number of teacher contacts.

All of these issues need careful consideration and discussion with the federations to ensure a workable strategy is in place. This is further compounded by the fact that most staff have been provided with tentative assignments which may need to be reviewed once the plans for September are known.

11. **Discussion about Plans**

Planning for all three scenarios is complex. The preferred plan for education is definitely learning at school. Many have pointed to the paper released by Sick Kids which acknowledged the importance of returning to school to support student mental health and well-being. While this is of critical importance, Public Health officials are firmly maintaining the vital need for physical distancing and capacity for contact tracing if we are to continue to control the spread of the virus. Our Ottawa Public Health partners will not endorse plans that compromise these principles.

The largest unknown to educators, students and parents is the delivery of a hybrid model. For this reason, it is the most complex area of planning and the one which is the subject of much public discussion. Much of the concern around the hybrid model is tied to the important role that schools play in learning but also in society. There is

no question that full-time learning in school is the first choice for educators, employers and families. It provides important socialization for students, learning environments are better, personal relationships can be established, parents are able to work, and the economic activity can resume. However, a hybrid model may be a stepping stone towards the full time return to school and/or a return to learning at home, if required, in the event of a localized or generalized viral outbreak.

Staff has been researching and examining possible hybrid models for consideration. For the sake of clarity, it is easier to explain options for one panel at a time. In this report, we will focus on secondary school options. Four options have been discussed in detail at the collaboration table. These include:

i. **Full day alternate day with 4 courses per semester**
The model takes 2 weeks to cycle through, but all students have 50% of th eir time in school. This model could apply to mornings/afternoons with ea ch cohort only coming in the mornings or in the afternoons. (which would then be like model 3- part time am/pm) The model reduces the number of rotations i n the halls (mitigates risk) and the size of the group rotating, may not meet guidelines and there are concerns about staff/students, cleaning etc.

ii. **British Columbia Model – 2:1:2 with 4 courses per semester**

iii. **Block Timetabling Model – 1 course at a time; ½ day instruction**

iv. **Quadmester Model – Block timetabling 2 courses per semester/ full day alternate attendance**

12. Additional Information to Follow

There are a number of additional areas where work is underway to seek clarity on the guidelines and/or develop delivery options. This work is very fluid and more information will be shared on the following topics prior to or at the Board meeting:

- Childcare and Extended Day Programming
- Transportation and Discussions with OSTA
- Supports for Students with Special Education Needs
- Prioritizing Full time attendance for families with higher needs
- Mental Health Supports

13. Key Principles

Staff has reflected on the principles which have been guiding our work to date and has document the following which the Board might consider formally adopting as guiding principles:

- The safety and well-being of students and staff is our first priority;
- The OCDSB recognizes the importance of full-time learning at school to support student achievement and well-being and is committed to working towards the return of full-time learning as quickly as possible, with the advice of health agencies;
- The OCDSB recognizes the unique and important value of schools to supporting the ability of families, our community and the economy to return to operation;

- District planning will be done with flexibility and agility and in a way that will allow as many students to access face to face learning as frequently as possible within safety guidelines;
- The OCDSB will demonstrate its commitment to equity principles and wherever possible will differentiate the delivery model to address the needs our most vulnerable students (including special education needs, English Language Learners, school communities that are impacted by poverty);
- The OCDSB is committed to creating safe and welcoming learning environments at school and at home with access to quality instruction;
- The OCDSB recognizes the importance of collaboration and will continue to make decisions with key partners at the table and communicate decisions in a timely way to parents, students and staff.

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

14. Over the course of the past four months, the District has engaged in regular communication with parents, students and staff. Communication has been maintained with Trustees by way of weekly COVID updates. This will continue over the summer and once the school year begins. One key element to be confirmed is the process for confirmation of attendance. There will be a cut-off date for new school registrations established by the Ministry. Locally, it will be necessary to establish a process for parents to confirm existing OCDSB students' intention to attend school. That is expected to be mid-summer.

Week of July 1st
> Communicate to parents, students and staff and invite feedback on their experiences with Learn At Home and provide input into the planning for Return to School. There will be ten days for participants to respond and participants will be able to access the feedback and input received within a week of the closure of the survey exchange.

Week of July 13th
> • Share feedback from the survey exchange
> • Provide an update on planning for September
> • Share information about the process for registration/confirmation of attendance, if required
> • Confirmation about first day of school if possible
> • Clarification on when to expect more information
> • Register anytime

Week of August 10th
> • Update on planning for September, possible confirmation of model
> • Information about preparing for school and what families need to do to be ready
> • Covid-19 Status update and implications for safety
> • Register anytime

Week of August 24th
> • Welcome back messaging
> • Confirmation/Reaffirm model for September

- Specific details about student program/school etc.
- How to access buildings and/or online learning
- What to expect in the first week
- Transportation services

Week of September 1st
- Final planning details
- Welcome message from principal
- Teacher contact information

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

15. From a resource perspective, the return to school plan must be developed within existing budgets and within existing staff resources. As work continues on refining the models, staff will be better positioned to identify specific costs. Currently, it is expected that the staff recommended budget for 2020-2021 will include approximately $2M to cover additional expenses, which might include technology, personal protective equipment, cleaning, staffing and other costs. More information will be shared at the Board meeting and at the upcoming Budget Committee meeting.

16. From a human resources perspective, the two primary concerns are the potential impact on staffing, including staff who may not be available for work for medical or family reasons and/or who may require an accommodation. Any additional increased staffing pressures would be challenging to measure. Equally important are health and safety concerns and the need to ensure measures are in place for the organization and for employees to feel confident. These are both important issues in terms of mitigating risks, managing resources and ensuring compliance with regulatory responsibilities. They are also critical issues in terms of the Board's commitment to creating a culture of caring and social responsibility.

RECOMMENDATION:

A. THAT the Board direct staff to develop plans for the implementation of three scenarios for the delivery of public education in September 2020 in accordance with the Ministry of Education guidelines and the guiding principles outlined in Report 20-061;

B. THAT the 2020-2021 Staff Recommended Budget identify the provisions and estimates associated with the implementation of return to school plans; and

C. THAT the interim and annual financial reports that are provided to the Board include a summary of costs and any recoveries associated with the return to school plans.

Brett Reynolds
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of Education

Camille Williams-Taylor
Director of Education
and Secretary of the
Board

Attachments:
Appendix A: Ministry Guidelines(Approach to reopening schools for the 2020-2021 School Year)
 Appendix B: Employee Update # 20
Appendix C: Excerpt from 22 June 2020 Board Meeting