
July 9th, 2020

OCDSB Trustees
Special Board Meeting

Re: Proposed COVID-19 back to school measures

Dear trustees,

I write to you today not as a parent, but as a concerned citizen who is cognisant that our best step to allow the economy to reopen is to allow schools to safely and consistently reopen with appropriate measures in place. It is best for students and for society as a whole. At the same time, I am of the opinion that our students should be among the highest priority for return to safely coordinated in-person activities.

I am grateful that you are taking the time to carefully consider proper procedures to help make this happen.

1. Weekly and not 2-1-2

I encourage you to consider a weekly format in order to maximize student instruction time and allow for easier parent planning. A weekly format compared to 2-1-2 results in an additional day of instruction time per week, adding up substantially over the school year. Cleaning can be undertaken on weekends, although I recognize that this may add to overall cost.

Such an approach also better allows for self-isolation of cohorts of students in case there is exposure to COVID-19. By simply missing one week of on-site instruction students could meet the 14-day isolation requirement. Meanwhile, it allows for a full weekend of deep cleaning of schools that would allow students in the off-week cohort to continue their regular scheduling without impact.

For high schoolers, a semestered system of classes offered in one week intensive blocks (either all-day and/or half days) may allow for better flexibility between on-site and e-learning. For instance, one week on-site could be focused on in-person courses that benefit most from in-person demonstrations and interaction (ie. woodworking, drama, music), while the next week could be focused on courses that better translate to e-learning (ie. languages). This would allow precious in-person time and facilities to be best put to use when available.

2. Off-Cycle Alternatives to Online Learning

A weekly approach to learning allows for more predictability and routine for students as well as easier coordination of off-cycle learning alternatives to online learning solutions. These

alternatives would essentially be 1-week camps that would be permitted to replace online learning sessions for some or all students and ideally that could/would focus on specific areas of the curriculum and/or the development of other valuable skills.

I would encourage that planning be made (ideally in conjunction with community partners like those mentioned in the next section of this submission) on a range of possibilities that these could be, focusing potentially on soft skills and physical activity including:

1. Outdoor education and activities (ie. snowshoeing, sports, etc)
2. Fitness activities either indoors or outside (ie. running, skating, stretching/yoga, etc)
3. Learning trade skills (ie. carpentry)
4. Targeted private tutoring and/or instruction
5. Co-op placements, volunteer work, and/or other appropriate skill building activities, including (for high school students) potentially helping to run some of these off-cycle activities
6. Interactive museum learning programs

I would ideally suggest that a number of these alternatives be provided at low or no cost in order to minimize the potential disproportionate impact on less wealthy students. Potential subsidies should be explored, in conjunction with city, provincial, and federal governments.

3. Tap Into Additional Facilities

There is a huge opportunity for cities and other local facilities to help provide the additional physical space required to get as many students engaged in valuable in-person activities at a time. Allowing such off-cycle alternatives to learning could both make use of currently underutilized spaces during the daytime and open up new opportunities for businesses to create new income streams and hire employees in these difficult times.

I would encourage the OCDSB to reach out to a range of potential partners that can be tapped to provide more physical space for traditional and/or non-traditional learning including:

1. Museums
2. City facilities (skating rinks, gymnasiums, community centres, etc)
3. Private gymnastics centres
4. City, provincial, and national parks and their facilities
5. Curling clubs
6. Lawn bowling facilities
7. Other recreational centres
8. Any range of local businesses
9. Office buildings

Specifically when it comes to offices there is potential that a number of vacant offices could be transitioned into makeshift education centres - especially for high schoolers. This has precedent in the federal government's approach to transferring the use of the Asticou property for a high school in Gatineau. The use of socially-distanced desks in unused/underused office complexes

for the goal of getting students back to in-person instruction should take precedent where those office activities can reasonably continue to be done remotely. With staggered scheduled start and end times, concerns for the impact on elevators and distancing on transit can be minimized. With enough office buy-in the more resilient and independent high school students could be shifted to these temporary facilities, opening up high schools for use by elementary students for more traditional in-school instruction.

I understand that students may as a result not be educated in their proper school zone and may be required to travel a bit more than usual. As a result I would expect that additional special OC Transpo lines and/or school buses could be used to minimize this impact, coupled potentially with opt-in procedures for students to choose to attend these alternative locations instead of participating in their education electronically.

4. Parents Need help

Parents need help no matter what decision is made. This help will need to include government policy reform, clear and easy to follow direction from teachers about expectations and what is required versus good additional work to do, as well as subsidization. No busy parents is helped by 15 emails a day from various teachers about what they need to do.

Recognizing that not all parents work typical 9-5 jobs, some parents may need to continue to receive a CERB type payment in order to help ensure that their rent/mortgage, groceries and other basic needs can continue to be met while they are required to miss work due to the lack of school or child care options. I implore you to push for this and to recommend these types of programs at all levels of government.

5. Conclusion

While recognizing your financial and jurisdictional limitations that I am very aware that you face, I encourage you to be innovative and courageous in making for the best possible learning environments for our kids while reaching out to community partners for support in this unprecedented time. Children's education is everyone's responsibility. We need to enhance and further develop the partnerships between parents, educators and businesses within our city to provide the children with the best education possible and help build the best community possible during these trying times.

Sincerely,

Scott Hindle

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