

Dear OCDSB Families:

I wanted to provide an update of our current progress on supporting student learning during the COVID-19 closure and some information about possible next steps. I know that there are many different perspectives on this issue, and at the OCDSB, we are working to find a path forward that meets the many needs and perspectives. We are fortunate to be doing this work with the Ministry of Education, our provincial and local education partners, and our many dedicated educators. While things are changing rapidly, here is what we can share right now:

- **School Closure Period** - Schools were originally scheduled to be closed until April 5th. Yesterday, the Premier announced that the closure would extend beyond that date. At this time, we do not have any more information about the length of the closure. We understand the Ministry will be providing more information and we will share that when it becomes available.
- **Learning Resources** - We are committed to sharing resources to help engage students, parents and families. Last week we shared the Ministry of Education Learn At Home resources. This week, we have [additional learning resources](#) posted to our website and student portal as additional support to families. We know that finding time to access these resources can be challenging for some families and other families may be looking for additional and more specific resources. These resources are not a substitute for in-class instruction, but rather a first step in promoting learning based activities, and will be updated as we move forward.
- **Continuity of Learning** - While we await further Ministry direction, we are proactively working with District and Ministry staff to develop a continuity of learning plan. We know that it's not possible to replicate the school day online, but it is possible to identify key curricular concepts, best practices for online/remote learning, ensure online learning platforms and resources are in place, and establish new ways for teacher collaboration, instruction and assessment. We recognize that families have many questions about how learning will continue and we will expect to bring clarity to this over the next two weeks.
- **Staying Connected** - With the end of the March Break, our school-based staff are back at work. This week, our focus is reconnecting - school teams are working with each other, establishing work from home spaces, identifying technology capacity and most importantly, reaching out to their students and families. This week, students and families can expect to hear from principals and school staff. Watch for emails, newsletters, phone calls, and/or social media feeds. This will likely look different across the District depending on the grade and the practices already established for teacher to student and/or teacher to parent communication.
- **Access to Technology and Wifi** - We know that not all OCDSB students have access to a computer or wifi. We are working with the Ministry to consider strategies that could make technology available to students where needed. We are very sensitive to the varied and complex needs of our students and are committed to finding ways to support access to learning for all students.
- **Students with Special Education Needs** - Our Learning Support Services staff is working to ensure that continuity of learning plans include strategies to support students with specialized learning needs. The school district cannot provide in person support during this period of social distancing. We are exploring opportunities for connection with students with special education needs.

- **English Language Learners** - We recognize the unique needs of our English Language learners and are working to ensure that continuity of learning plans include strategies for English Language Learners. The additional learning resources that the OCDSB has made available, include resources to support English language development.
- **Risk of Loss of School Year** - 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.
- **Access to Schools and Playgrounds** - Access to all school buildings is completely restricted at this time. We know that school yards are important green spaces in many communities and school yards are open. However, play structures are not being cleaned and as a result are not a safe place for children to play.
- **Mental Health and Well-being** - This is a stressful time for families and many parents are balancing work with taking care of children. We have compiled a list of [online resources](#) that provide information and tips to support student, staff and parents mental health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. We would also like to share this [resource](#) from one of our partners for Indigenous students and families.

I know there are more questions and we remain committed to sharing information as soon as it becomes available. You may also monitor our social media accounts and visit our website: ocdsb.ca/covid19, which includes regularly updated “frequently asked questions”.

Please continue to practice safe social distancing.

Be well.

Camille Williams-Taylor

Director of Education/Secretary to the Board