

Communications Initiatives During COVID-19

In any emergency, communications is a vital source of aid for affected populations. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, the OCDSB Communications team has remained focused on ensuring parents, students and staff have been able to receive timely and accurate information. These efforts have been motivated by the OCDSB's commitment to a culture of caring.

In doing so, we have worked to blend information about school closures and learning, with links to key health authorities, mental health resources and community support mechanisms.

Due to the nature of this evolving situation, we have not always had the information needed available. However, Communications has worked to maintain a regular flow of information, logging queries and requests to be addressed when details would later become available.

Communications Channels

All OCDSB owned channels have been used in communications response efforts as appropriate. This includes emails to all parents, students and staff; social media outreach via Facebook, Twitter and Instagram; and the OCDSB website has served as a central information hub.

Beyond this, the OCDSB has maintained regular contact with local media outlets and also purchased advertisements in multiple languages to reach diverse communities through CHIN radio.

Email: Since February 6, [more than 20 emails](#) have been sent to parents with information about topics ranging from health information, school closures, child care, learning at home, mental health resources, assessment, graduations and leaving ceremonies. A further [14 emails](#) have been sent to students on similar topics. These numbers do not include outreach on a school-level from principals and teachers. Beyond outward communication to all parents, District Communications staff have replied to more 300 emails from parents and students.

Social media: The OCDSB has an active social media following with more than 25,000 followers on Twitter and nearly 10,000 on Facebook, and 773 followers on Instagram. These sources have been used to amplify OCDSB announcements, share health information from official sources such as Ottawa Public Health, and provide links to important resources. Social media has also been used to showcase and highlight all of the creative ways school staff are reaching out to students.

Website: As COVID-19 advanced, the OCDSB website has been used as a key resource to inform parents and students. Content has been divided into two key landing pages:

1. [COVID-19 Resources](#): Contains all updates to parents and students, links to official health authorities, FAQs, health resources, letters to parents from the Minister of Education,

and mental health and community support resources (including resources for sponsors and newcomers).

2. [Learn at Home](#): Contains background details of OCDSB learning program during school closures, including background on Learn at Home Plan, parent guide, additional external online learning, videos with information about online tools (in English and Arabic), and links to additional resources and supports available.

Media outreach: The OCDSB maintains active relationships with local media outlets. From March – May, Communications staff have responded to more than 100 media requests from local and national news outlets seeking information about the OCDSB response to COVID-19 and ongoing learning.

CHIN Radio: From late April through May, the OCDSB purchased public service announcements in Italian, Spanish, South Asian, Portuguese, Haitian and Arabic on CHIN Radio for a four-week period. The advertisements addressed the following themes: requesting families connect with schools, learning at home, assessment and evaluation, mental health resources, Arabic-language resources available, and learning support resources. While many initiatives were engaged to reach families across the OCDSB, it's worth noting that during the CHIN radio ad campaign, the number of families schools had not yet reached dropped from 400 to 37.

Soliciting Feedback

In April, the OCDSB launched a district-wide ThoughtExchange survey to solicit feedback from parents and students on learning at home. More than 7000 individuals participated, sharing 8900 thoughts for consideration. These efforts helped guide strategy and information provided to parents and students. A second survey would be sent to graduating students to receive their feedback on graduation ceremonies and celebrating the Class of 2020.