



OTTAWA-CARLETON
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Office of the Chair of the Board

Sent by email: [REDACTED]

Dr. Vera Etches
Ottawa Public Health
100 Constellation Drive
Ottawa, ON K2G 6J8

18 August 2020

Dear Dr. Etches:

The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board held a Special Board meeting on Friday, 14 August 2020, to discuss our staff's operational plans for reopening schools in September in detail. Trustees had many questions as we try to prioritize resource allocations to ensure the safest possible reopening for our students and staff and their families.

We are very thankful for all the help and advice provided by Ottawa Public Health through your frequent interactions with OCDSB staff. There are still some outstanding questions on which trustees would greatly appreciate hearing from you directly. I have tried to capture these in a more organized way in the attachment to this letter.

Dr. Etches, trustees found your July attendance at our Special Board meeting very informative and very helpful. Your answers to the questions detailed on the attached page will help us make informed decisions and provide better information to the many parents who are contacting us with their concerns. We will be making some decisions on resources in our budget deliberations tomorrow evening, and any information you can provide immediately would be very useful.

Trustees will be holding another Special Board meeting at 7 pm on Tuesday, 25 August 2020, at which trustees will have further discussions of our plans for reopening OCDSB schools and, I expect, debate whether to require masks for our youngest students. I know that your schedule is very full, but I would like to invite you or another member of your senior team to attend that meeting if you are available, as we value your expert advice. The questions attached provide an overview of the kinds of information which we would hope you could share.

Thank you very much for your consideration,

Sincerely,

Lynn Scott
Chair, Board of Trustees

cc: Trustees, Ottawa-Carleton District School Board
Senior Staff, Ottawa-Carleton District School Board
Corporate Records

Trustee Questions for Ottawa Public Health

Face Masks

The provincial government has mandated the use of face masks at school for all students in Grades 4 to 12, but the City of Ottawa has mandated the use of face masks for all citizens aged 2 and up in indoor public spaces and on public transit. Trustees are considering mandating the use of face masks for students in Kindergarten to Grade 3. From a public health perspective, would this add significantly to the safety of our students and staff at school? Who should be exempted from such a face mask mandate? Are face shields an appropriate alternative for students who cannot safely manage face masks? Could you identify any best practices that would minimize the risk associated with improper mask handling, especially for younger students?

Class Size and Physical Distancing

With all the other precautionary measures in place, will physical distancing of one metre be sufficient regardless of the number of students in a classroom? With limited availability of funding for additional teachers and of additional suitable classroom spaces, do you have any advice on how to prioritize the use of our resources to address class size and distancing issues? Should we direct more resources to kindergarten classes serving our youngest students, or to larger classes of our older elementary students? How effective are desktop barriers? Are there areas of the city where students may be at higher risk where we should be directing more resources?

Screening, Testing, Contact Tracing, Self-Isolation and Quarantine

Many parents are anxious to know the specifics of public health protocols for dealing with instances of students or staff who contract COVID-19 and when and how decisions might be made to shut down one or more classes within a school or to close a school if there is an outbreak. When will details of these protocols be published?

Itinerant Staff and Movement of Specialist Staff within a School

What additional precautions should be in place for itinerant staff and occasional teachers who may serve more than one school? What additional precautions should be in place for teachers and educational assistants who may move from class to class within a school to deliver specialized instruction or support to students?

Ventilation

With a mixture of older and newer school facilities and HVAC systems in the OCDSB, can you provide advice with regard to prioritizing upgrades to existing systems and/or short-term solutions for situations requiring immediate attention?

Containing Community Spread

Recognizing that success in containing the spread of COVID-19 when schools reopen will be contingent on a collective community effort to support multiple precautionary measures, could you please comment on the appropriateness and adequacy of the combination of measures that are being implemented? Are there more actions that could and should be taken?