



BOARD
Report No. 21-024

23 February 2021

Report Title: Planning For The 2021-2022 School Year

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PURPOSE:

1. To provide an update regarding the planning for the 2021-2022 school year.

CONTEXT:

2. Planning for the upcoming school year is a multi-step process based on enrolment projections which inform staffing allocations in accordance with collective agreement requirements. The COVID-19 pandemic created serious disruption to the planning process for the 2020-2021 school year. Emerging provincial health and education directives required continued changes to the planning process, delivery models and a delayed start to the school year. Much has been learned about the safe operation of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and this learning has and will continue to inform the planning for the 2021-2022 school year. The Ministry of Education has encouraged boards to plan for the return to in-person learning. With this in mind, it must be a priority to make key decisions around learning structures now in order to allow planning and staffing to occur in a manner that respects collective agreement timelines and that provides staff, students and families with the stability and predictability that they did not have leading into this past school year.

STRATEGIC LINKS:

3. The OCDSB strategic priorities are centered on building a culture of innovation, caring and social responsibility. The priorities have guided decision-making throughout the pandemic and continue to shape the planning for September 2021. Our planning integrates our commitment to setting high expectations for all learners in a caring community, modernizing instructional strategies and business practices to support all students and in particular our most vulnerable students, to ensure the sustainable and safe operation of schools.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

4. COVID-19 in Schools

Since March 2020, District staff has been meeting regularly with Ottawa Public Health (OPH) and the co-terminous school boards to collaborate on the management of COVID-19 in schools. A recent [report published by Ottawa Public Health](#) reviewed data for Ottawa area school districts and noted there is “*evidence of limited transmission of COVID-19 within schools, which peaked in early October and then declined. Infection rates in schools are similar to that in the community. As community rates of COVID-19 increase, it is especially important for staff, students, and parents to continue following public health recommendations to prevent COVID-19 transmission within schools.*”

The many safeguards put in place for staff and students, including requirements for mask wearing, cohorting and physical distancing, personal protective equipment (PPE), cleaning and disinfection, daily screening for symptoms, testing guidelines, and coordinated communications have provided a workable framework for the safe operation of our schools.

5. Ministry Direction for September

The provincial government has been very clear in their commitment to prioritize keeping schools open. To date, the Ministry has not provided any formal guidance for school operations for the 2021-2022 school year, except to suggest that districts should be planning with the expectation that students will be returning in person. In terms of funding, messaging from the Ministry has been that boards should not count on the continuation of the additional COVID-19 funding that was provided for the current school year and to plan for staffing respecting the collective agreements.

6. What We Have Learned

Reflecting on the experiences of the past year, there are some key observations and learning that will inform planning for next year:

- Schools can operate safely with proper adherence to public health guidelines and safety protocols;
- The safe operation of schools and childcare is essential to the social and economic fabric of our community;
- We must retain capacity to pivot to remote learning as required at the class, school or system level;
- Attending school in-person is important to learning and well-being and students are more engaged in their learning when they can interact with their teachers and peers and build supportive relationships;
- There is a need for stability and efforts must be made to minimize the number of transitions and reorganizations to the extent possible;
- The number of students who require virtual learning as an accommodation is a relatively small percentage of the current the Ottawa-Carleton Virtual school (OCV) population;

- The ongoing optimization of the virtual learning environment has many benefits and is essential to ensure our capacity to pivot to remote learning; and
- Many of the supports for our most vulnerable learners are more readily accessed through in-person learning.

7. **Planning for September and COVID-19**

As we plan for a more fulsome return to in-person learning in September 2021, we recognize that the District and parents will continue to be responding to the impacts of the pandemic. Building on our learning from this year, we expect to continue to have public health directives which maintain many, if not all of the safety protocols that are currently in place:

- Minimizing the number of student direct and indirect contacts;
- Maintaining cohorting;
- Having provisions in place to support contact tracing;
- Regular use of technology to support the transition into remote learning if required; and
- Maintaining a virtual learning option for students.

Much of these are dependent, to varying degrees, upon sufficient funding being made available to school districts, municipalities, health care and other community agencies.

8. **Planning Considerations**

The two most critical components to the planning process are enrolment projections and staffing. Enrolment projections are done school-by-school based on current enrolment, retention trends, planning information, program offerings, and local knowledge of the school. The enrolment data informs staffing allocations and between February and October, there are several key dates where enrolment projections are reviewed and updated.

This year, enrolment projections are more complex in light of the number of students enrolled in OCV, the number of students engaged in homeschooling, delayed kindergarten registrations and the decrease in the number of international students. As we move towards a return to in-person learning for September 2021, we anticipate a reduction in the number of students enrolled in OCV. However, that information needs to be confirmed. In order to provide students and families with the necessary information and respond to questions, we expect to communicate our in-person and virtual models by the end of February 2021. Families will need to confirm their attendance in March 2021.

9. **Elementary In-Person**

We look forward to welcoming students back to in-person learning in September 2021. In-person learning for K-8 will be modelled on our current practice.

- Students will continue to be cohorted by class, and staff will rotate from class to class as the schedule demands;
- There will be a continued focus on reducing the number of educator contacts who are delivering instruction to each homeroom/cohort; and

- The use of learning management systems (LMS) will remain in place for each class in order to support a transition to remote learning should the need arise, or where individual students are required to isolate.

We will continue to work with the Ministry of Education and OPH to evaluate our health and safety practices and how these may be modified as we move through the 2021-2022 school year and the COVID-19 situation changes. Our goal will be to resume regular operations incrementally and as it is safe to do so. From a budget perspective, some of the extra measures put in place this year will require continued additional funding from the province to ensure proper cleaning and PPE is in place.

10. **Elementary Virtual**

While the majority of elementary students will return to in-person learning, there will be a virtual learning option for a smaller cohort of students. This is intended for students for whom online learning better meets their learning needs and for students who need to continue with virtual learning due to underlying medical conditions for themselves or for family members. Enrolment in virtual school is not intended to be transitory, students who register in a virtual school should plan for the full school year.

Currently, there is no provincial funding for virtual schools for 2021-2022, and so planning and operation will need to be funded within our current envelope. With a smaller cohort of students attending school virtually the delivery model may not benefit from the same economy of scale.

11. **Exploring Best Practices in Virtual Learning**

Over the past several weeks, staff has been exploring different delivery models in place this year to consider best practices. The range of models includes:

- a) the establishment of a separate virtual elementary school, similar to what was implemented this year;
- b) a virtual option within each individual school; and
- c) a hybrid model where students learning both in person and remotely are grouped in the same class and supported by the same teacher.

A number of criteria were identified to help assess the various models of remote learning including, how each model will:

- Support the educational needs of the students requiring this learning mode;
- Support the social emotional and developmental needs of our learners;
- Support the effective and efficient use of district resources, including, technological, financial and human resources; and
- Provide stability to the system etc.

12. **Virtual Delivery Model**

Based on the above criteria, our experience this year, discussions with other districts, and anticipated budget availability, the OCV model will continue to serve us well next year. Recognizing there will be fewer students in virtual learning, the number of virtual schools will be reduced, and it may be necessary to reconfigure the schools based on enrolment (e.g., two K-8 schools or one K-6 and one 7-8 or

some other configuration). Each virtual school will have a designated administrative team.

- Classes will be assigned by geographic area, allowing students to be in class with peers from their family of schools; and
- Virtual class sizes will be maximized and are more likely to include combined grades. This will allow in person classes to be smaller. Kindergarten (29) and primary classes (23) will be at the maximum cap and classes in grades 4-8 will likely be between 28 and 35 students. Combined classes will be closer to 28 and single grade classes up to 35.

13. **Program Availability in Virtual Classes**

With a smaller cohort of students in virtual learning, program offerings may be affected, especially for very small programs such as Middle French Immersion (MFI) and English Alternative.

- As such, program options for elementary virtual learning will include the English Program with Core French (ENG) and Early French Immersion (EFI). Students presently enrolled in MFI or English Alternative who require virtual learning may have to consider a one-year change to the English program for the 2021-2022 school year and return to their program of choice in the 2022-2023 school year.
- In order to maximize available French language capacity across all programs in both the virtual and in-person classes, some reduction in the amount of French as a Second Language (FSL) instruction per grade is anticipated.
 - Core French will be provided in the English Program;
 - A minimum of 50% French language instruction will be provided in the immersion program; and
 - Kindergarten programming will remain a 50/50 model in virtual learning.
- Virtual learning will be based on 180 minutes synchronous learning and 120 minutes asynchronous learning in kindergarten, and for grades 1-8, 225 minutes synchronous learning and 75 minutes asynchronous learning.

14. **Secondary In-Person**

At the secondary level, we look forward to welcoming students back to in-person learning in September 2021. We anticipate that the school year will begin with the current safety measures in place and as we move through the school year, we hope to be able to incrementally resume more regular activities and operation, subject to health guidelines.

- In September 2021, the school year will be organized into quadesters except for the International Baccalaureate Program (IB) schools which follow octomesters;
- Students will continue to be grouped into cohorts, A and B with only one cohort attending each day; and
- The specific daily schedule cannot be confirmed at this time, but we would hope to start the year and/or move to two classes a day and a lunch break between classes as soon as possible.

These plans are based on current data and Ministry direction and our ongoing consultation with OPH. Once provincial direction and advice from OPH supports the removal of cohorting, daily attendance, and/or a return to the regular semester format, we will look to implement those changes as quickly as possible. Our goal will be to resume regular operations incrementally and as it is safe to do so, with a view to reducing the amount of transition. In some cases, this may mean looking at natural break points, such as the end of a quadmester/octomester or at second semester.

15. Secondary Virtual Learning

While the majority of secondary students will return to in-person learning, there will be a virtual learning option intended for students for whom online learning better meets their needs and for students with an underlying medical condition for themselves or for family members.

OCV will continue as a stand-alone secondary school. This will help to ensure the school can offer a full selection of courses in each grade level. However, that will not include system programs, such as IB, Arts or High Performance Athletics (HPA); these will be offered in-person.

OCV will continue to be organized in quadmesters in the fall. The specific daily schedule is not yet finalized. There will not be a formal examination period.

Student support staff such as guidance counsellors, student success teachers and learning support teachers will be allocated directly to OCV. Graduating students will be offered the opportunity to participate in their designated school's graduation celebrations and commencement. Other efforts will be made to maintain a connection between those students in OCV and their designated school.

Students/parents/guardians opting for virtual learning for September 2021 should do so with the intention of remaining in virtual learning for the entire school year. Requests to return to in person learning will be considered on a case-by-case basis and accommodated where possible.

16. Adult High School and Secondary Alternate Program

Adult High School will continue to provide remote options for learners, as is the current model. Students who attend one of the District's Secondary Alternate Programs will continue to have the option of registering with OCV or be provided with remote learning options through their program site.

17. Special Education including Specialized Program Classes

This year's experience shows that we are best able to support students with special education needs, and particularly those in specialized program classes in an in-person format. Students with special education needs in regular classes will continue to be supported with the necessary accommodations/modifications provided in their Individual Education Plan (IEP) (in-person or in OCV).

Specialized program classes offer the highest level of support and much of that support is centred on the capacity to provide timely and effective interventions. For

these reasons, in the 2021-2022 school year specialized program classes will return to in-person delivery.

18. English Literacy Development and English as a Second Language

Experience and feedback indicate that students in the English Literacy Development (ELD) program (elementary and secondary) are best served in person. As COVID-19 protocols relax, a personalized approach to integration will continue as has been past practice with students moving into regular classes for designated subjects as deemed appropriate while continuing to receive intensive English language support in the congregated classroom.

Planning is currently underway to establish supports for OCV students requiring English as a Second Language (ESL)/ELD support.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

19. To date the Ministry has indicated that there will be no additional COVID-19 funding for the 2021-2022 school year. While this may change, planning decisions must be made with the understanding that they will need to be funded through the regular board budget.

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

20. Regular communication with staff, students and families has been a key part of our strategy this year. Updates are provided by direct email on a weekly basis and these messages are supported by social media, frequently asked questions (FAQ) documents, publications, videos and town hall or other meetings.

In addition to the wealth of feedback received through regular channels, the District planned three formal consultation periods to learn more about the current year experience. The first consultation was in October 2021, the second consultation is currently underway, and a third consultation will be done in late spring. The feedback received through these processes has helped to inform both current practice and future planning. In addition, the following communication activities have been undertaken to inform planning:

- Weekly meetings with OPH and all four-area school boards;
- Ongoing consultation with the affected bargaining units;
- Regular focused discussions through the Collaborative Learning Table which includes representatives from Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) and the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), Learning Support Services (LSS), principals and vice-principals, Program and Learning K-12, Equity and Human Rights, etc.
- Targeted consultation with other school districts to gather information on their experience with virtual learning to understand best practices in delivery models;

21. **Messaging About the Upcoming School Year**

The next step in the preparing for the upcoming school year is sharing plans with the community. Work is underway to consolidate the breadth of information in this report into a summary overview which will support parents, students and staff in their planning for September. The key messages for this communication are:

We look forward to welcoming students and staff back to school in-person for September 2021;

- In-person learning is important to student achievement and well-being;
- We know from experience that with appropriate protocols in place, schools can safely operate with limited evidence of transmission of COVID-19;
- Virtual school options will be available for students with specific medical or learning needs;
- Virtual school registration is for the full year. After the start of the year, moves will be accommodated on a case-by-case basis, but are not guaranteed.
- Based on experience this year, special education program classes will be offered in person only next year.
- For planning purposes, all students will be registered/moved back to their in-person school for next fall unless they register for virtual school.

In the next week, more detailed information will be shared with families to ensure they have a fulsome understanding of planning for September 2021 and are able to confirm their registration for in-person learning or register for virtual learning. The process may be different for elementary and secondary students. For example, at the secondary level, this may be activated through the secondary course selection process which is mandatory and requires parental consent. At the elementary level, work is underway to determine the best collection mechanism. As this information is essential enrollment data and also informs staffing decisions, it must be received by mid-March 2021.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

1. Does the planning support the learning and well-being needs of students?
2. Does the planning for September align with available resources?
3. Are there additional strategies to support the needs of our most vulnerable learners? and
4. What additional information or resources would support families in preparing for the upcoming school year?

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