

**WRFN School Issue Support Group
Q & A Session
August 18, 2020**

Funding

Q - Will there be cuts in funding or lack of such toward special needs at public schools (EA time, one-on-one support, etc.) considering COVID challenges?

A – Right now there are no cuts; a provincial announcement 3 weeks ago provided increased funding for special education, mental health, and custodial services.

Health & Safety

Q 1 - Will holding hands with an EA be allowed?

A 1 – We are providing an operational procedural document to all staff. We will try to decrease hand over hand as much as possible; promoting independence, as in the past. Sometimes an EA will still need to hold a child's hand, but we're discouraging this where possible.

Q 2 - Will substitute teachers be allowed to work in multiple schools?

A 2 – Yes, as they're provided with PPE; same for itinerant staff. The Waterloo boards are working together with public health, so health and safety procedures will be consistent across the boards.

Q 3 - If there is a COVID outbreak, what procedures will be implemented and how quickly?

A 3 – We will be receiving the outbreak protocol from the Ministry of Education/Public Health in the near future and will follow the protocol.

Q 4 - Can I make the request that my child's teacher wear a mask that is see through, so my child can be visually cued when the teacher is speaking?

A 4 – An order has been put forth for masks that are clear; these will be a priority for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. They are currently back-ordered. When they do arrive, the priority will be for staff working with students who are deaf or hard of hearing. We will look for other ways of cueing for other students; if absolutely needed for another student, work with Health & Safety to resolve this.

Q 5 - I've already been told my child's grade 6 class has 30 children. How does this accommodate for physical distancing? And why did the board not choose to follow a reduced class size as recommended by Sick children's Hospital and Public Health?

A 5 – Our direction comes from the Ministry; elementary is returning to a conventional model. There is no funding provided for additional teachers and most schools are already at maximum capacity.

Q 6- What are the precautions made for students with special needs specifically and all students in general?

A 6 – The operational document has a large section for special education; WRDSB and WCDSB procedures are mostly the same; difference between boards is that WRDSB has some congregated classes, vs WCDSB has the community living and active program in secondary school. We want really strong communication between home and school; staff are to ensure

communication protocols are in place – could be via communication book, or emails, or phone calls. Where special education students are in the classroom, there are recommendations for how the class looks and also some staff may be wearing full PPE, etc.

Q 7- Will you limit the number of EAs assigned to each student to reduce the number of exposures without reducing care? If the kids are sharing, will they be sharing with kids in their class?

A 7 – We hope to limit having multiple EAs for a student. When physical distancing is not possible, EA will be in full PPE and the EA would get fresh PPE before working with the next student.

Q 8- If an EA is used in Extended Day program will they try to use that EA during the school day to limit the exposure?

A 8 – Staff can move between classrooms because of PPE; therefore staff can also be in both an extended day class and a regular daytime class.

Q 9- What happens to a class if a student is sent home with a runny nose? Full class quarantined or required to be tested?

A 9 – Our first hope is that everyone self-assesses at home daily, and keeps child home if they are sick. We are awaiting more direction from public health; still to be finalized with respect to outbreak protocol

Q 10- What is the protocol for a child with symptoms that might have siblings in other classes? Will that child and their siblings be sent home with the idea that there is a good chance siblings will have exposure?

A 10 – Public health is providing the guidance; most decisions are coming provincially. We're hoping to receive protocol this week. These are public health decisions and protocols.

Q 11- How are you handling masks requirements in a grade 3/4 split?

A 11 – In the WRDSB and WCDSB, all students will be wearing masks

Q 12- If a student or staff member exhibits symptoms, will the other parents in the entire school be informed immediately so they have the opportunity to keep their kids home the next day?

A12 – The public health protocols will guide that; it's unlikely that entire school would be informed.

Q 13- For kids with symptoms, will the parents be required to get them tested through public health and will public health have the responsibility of informing the school of the results or is the onus on the parents to report results? Will the parents be required to get the child tested or is there a possibility the parents could just isolate the child for 14 days?

A 13 – This is a public health decision and protocol will be filled by schools. We are awaiting the protocol.

Q 14- Will the school start date be delayed?

A 14 – Both boards are staggering entry. Check each boards website for details
<https://www.wcdsb.ca/> and <https://www.wrdsb.ca/>

Q 15- How can the students be physically distanced by 1m in classrooms?

A 15 – Desks have to be 1m apart and facing forward; if this is not possible, class is being moved to an alternate space like the library.

Q 16- Will students still have EA support and have access to sensory/calming rooms?

A 16 – Students will have EA support. Some direction will be provided around sensory rooms, for example it could include having a separate bin of sensory items for each student using the room, one child at a time using the room, etc.

Q 17- What will happen to students who go to the Spec Ed room for programs like Empower or Lexia?

A 17 – Plans are still being finalized; unable to respond to this question at this time.

Q 18- Will a student lose EA support or Spec Ed programs if they don't return until later in the year?

A 18 – Refer to the board's Q&A page. No, a student will not lose the support at the school if they choose to do online learning.

Q 19- Our school says students will be in charge of keeping their own desks cleaned and disinfected. How? Will they all be passing around the bottles of disinfectant or will each have their own? How will this be policed?

A 19 – Students will be expected to wipe their desks and the cleaning material will be provided by the school.

Q 20- What chemicals will our kids be breathing in at school? Will the parents be given the WHMIS sheets for each cleaning product? Will the products be as unscented and least hazardous as possible?

A 20 – There are a lot of guidelines to follow regarding chemicals that aren't harmful to staff and students; WHMIS sheets are public information; we will look for cleaners that have minimal scents.

Q 21- Will the kids be kept apart on the playground? How?

A 21 – Parameters are being sent out to all school principals. Schools are encouraged to keep children in their cohorts. Each playground is different therefore each school's expectations may be slightly different; some will have staggered outdoor times, others have large enough playgrounds relative to the school population that they can be outside at the same time but create separate areas for different cohorts.

Q 22- How will bathroom breaks work?

A 22 – Schools are setting up protocols and schedules; there will be signing in and out of the bathroom protocol.

Q 23- If a student has a cold (not COVID), do they need to stay home until the cold is over?

A 23 – If a child is sick, the child should stay home. This includes a child with a cold.

Q 24- Will staff like OTs and other consultants still be going into the schools? If so, how will the board ensure COVID isn't spread among schools?

A 24 – Yes they will. Procedures will include calling ahead to the school, wearing PPE, and being traced by signing in and out of each school.

Q 25- How do we deal with children who are scared to go back?

A 25 – The Ministry has worked collaboratively with School Mental Health Ontario ([SMHO](#)) and developed resources. We've also hired more social workers to support children with this transition.

Q 26- Since ASD kids feel rule following is extremely important, how are we to help them understand why the physical distancing rules are different in schools than anywhere else?

Q 26 – We will work to teach them physical distancing. Resources, visuals and videos have been developed to support the teaching of physical distancing.

Supports

Q 1- What will transition plans for elementary students with special needs look like for the 2020/2021 school year?

A 1 – Resources have been developed to support transition plans, staff have been working throughout the summer and we will be working on three key skills: hand-washing, physical distancing, and mask-wearing.

Q 2- Will there be more consistent EA scheduling?

A 2 – The goal is to have as little inconsistencies as possible.

Q 3- Except for full-day schooling, what would be offered by the board to facilitate the education process e.g. computer, learning material, extra activities?

Q 3 – A distant learning model is being developed for students/families/caregivers who choose not to attend school in person

High School

Q 1- I am wondering how we opt into 5-day schooling for a high-school aged student with special needs.

A 1 – In the WCDSB, “community & active living stream” will be 5-day schooling. In the WRDSB, the Alternative Continuum of Education Program will be everyday schooling as well.

Q 2- Is opting into a 5-day week possible for someone on an IEP in high school but not in a special program for their needs? If not, what can we expect from the SERT to support the student's distance learning?

A 2 – Students with complex needs will have the option to attend school every day. Most students with an IEP would not meet this criteria and would attend on alternate days

Q 3- Why isn't distance learning fully synchronous given that the school day is shortened already?

Q 4- What is the expectation between asynchronous vs synchronous hours that parents can expect their student to receive?

A 3&4 – Last week there was a Policy / Program Memorandum (PPM) from the Ministry which provided specific minimum daily times for synchronous teacher-led minutes:

- Kindergarten - 180/day
- Grades 1-3 - 225/day
- Grades 4-8 - 225/day
- Secondary - the higher of 60 minutes for each 75-minute class period, or 225 minutes per day for a full course schedule

PPM 164 guides remote learning: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/164.html>

Regardless of if staff have in-school or distance students, all teachers will have a virtual platform, so even if students are off school they can still access the platform

Q 5- What would a GLE look like now if my child is not participating in the class where students are working on literacy and numeracy? What should we be asking for?

A 5 – Speak with the Special Education Department Head about this course. The GLE can be used for study skills, working on other subjects, etc – it is adaptable.

Q 6- Are there any plans for special needs students to connect with or visit school prior to the start of term?

A 6 – Schools will be reaching out to a group of our Special Education Students. As a result of strict protocols we will not be able to open our doors for families to have a tour of the school; only specific students will have an appointment to enter before school starts.

Q 7- If we choose to have our kids attend school in person, is it possible for them to work in a REC cohort?

A 7 – Currently all students are assigned to a classroom and that would be their cohort; we are not assigning them to another cohort.

Q 8- How do students catch up in quadmesters? My kids need extra time to complete courses. How is that going to work when we have twice as much work in a day?

A 8 – We think students will have time; they will have an hour/day for distance synchronous learning – this should help. Also they are only working on 2 courses at a time instead of 4, so that should help as well.

Senior Kindergarten

Q - Will my child still have a quiet room to go to with support when necessary, as planned before COVID?

A - These plans are reviewed regularly. We would want an area in the classroom rather than a separate quiet room; need to have a conversation with the special education teacher. If a separate quiet room is used, this would probably need to be at a planned time.

SK Distance Learning

Q 1- How will my child's school accommodate distance learning (eg could she attend class zoom meetings but complete all other work on paper, due to her sensitivity to light and screens)?

A 1 Yes – we are looking to support and accommodate needs. We are working on having options for families (tech and no tech, what if families don't have printers, etc.)

Q 2- Could we do much less than the 300 minutes that has been mentioned?

A2 – Yes, for example a child may be “done for the day” after synchronous time; we could work though that for the specific child. The Ministry has provided expectations and parameters in PPM 164; it allows for exceptions for students with special needs, for example less than 300 minutes per day. <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/164.html>

In-Person vs Distance Learning

Q 1- Who sets and oversees remote education standards?

A 1 – The Ministry sets the standards.

Q 2- Will there be an effort to keep the students at home connected to their school community? Invitations to virtual assemblies if there is such a thing?

A 2 – The virtual learning environment will have a teacher assigned. Students can connect to school via the virtual platform.

Q 3- What happens if we choose to send our children back on the survey and then conditions change before school starts or if our child is too scared before September 8? Can we change to do distance learning?

A3 – similar question to follow

Q 4- Is there more information about what online learning will look like?

A 4 – We have learned a lot in a short time. A lot of resources have been created, providing excellent learning for staff. Only two platforms will be used – D2L and Google Classroom.

Q 5- If one chooses online learning or home schooling, what is the available support to help families continue teaching their children.

A 5 – We had to make some additions to the board Q&A document to clarify between homeschooling and virtual distance learning.

- Homeschooling – child is not registered with a school; there may be some bits and pieces of info from boards provided to families, but the child is not enrolled
- Virtual Distant Learning – child is registered at a school

Q 6- What are the options to switch from one model to another, online/home schooling/full day schooling/hybrid day?

A 6 – Options will be communicated

Q 7- What will distance learning look like? Will the teachers be on camera for x hours a day teaching and answering questions?

A 7 – The Ministry document PPM 164 actually defines synchronous and nonsynchronous times and number of hours each teacher is expected to spend at each, and can be found at www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/164.html

Q 8- Will the kids doing distance learning be grouped with other kids in their school or will schools be combined for classes? Will kids be grouped according to the school board also or will both boards be collaborating?

A 8 – Grouping depends on the number of students at each school that are in the learning environment. They will be grouped by grade/blended grade.

Q 9- Will the kids doing distance learning be doing the same work at the same time as the kids at school? Will all schools within each board be following the same curriculum schedule? For example, every grade 7 student works on fractions from x week to y week. I'm thinking of families that maybe cohorting to help teach.

A 9 – They will be following the same curriculum but not necessarily in the same order or at the same time. This is similar to what traditionally occurs in schools (i.e., not all grade 7s in a school study the same thing at the same time, but they all cover the same curriculum over the school year.)

Q 10- How will distance learning students be evaluated?

A 10 – This is well-articulated in the PPM. There will be some greater expectations placed on students with respect to attendance and completion of work.

Q 11 - What if the kids aren't doing well with the distance learning format? If parents are able to create a schedule and teach them, can parents opt out of doing the distance learning work and still have the child enrolled at school?

A11 – This would be considered homeschooling and the student would come off the school register.

Structure

Q 1- How will classes be organized?

A 1 – We will look at who's returning to which environment. Classes that were figured out in June may need to be revised; we don't have exact numbers yet .

Q 2- Will the schools be encouraged to organize classes to be near cap size in September/October, or will we keep the original planned number of students in mind and we may end up with classes that are smaller because parents keep kids home?

A 2 – WRDSB has opened their survey back up until the end of the week; some people may choose a different option, now that the public board has decided that all students will wear masks.

Q 3- Has there been any thought given to having school outdoors for September and October?

A 3 – There has been lots of conversation about this; however we don't have the facilities for outdoor full-time education

Q 4- Will teachers still be going to multiple schools each week? Eg. Music and French?

A4 – Yes they will.

Q 5- When do you expect we will have full details about school?

A 5 – Both boards have made communicating to our community a priority, have developed Q&A, a return to learn guide and have developed a parent guide. Staff will work alongside students and families to ease the anxiety of the unknowns.

IEPs

Q 1 - How do we do our IEP? How can we cooperate with service providers? If online is chosen, how different would that be?

A 1 – The process wouldn't be much different for distance learning; resource teachers will be assigned to schools; accommodations and modifications will be provided.

Q 2- With virtual learning, will an accommodated curriculum be created to meet the expectations of the IEP from last year?

A 2 – Yes.

Q 3- How will a new IEP be created in a virtual setting where there isn't much interaction between teacher and student?

A 3 – See PPM 164 for this information

Additional Questions Added during the meeting

Q1 – Will the board guarantee our children won't be recorded for zoom meeting during class recordings. This is my biggest concern as my child displays several behaviors that I don't want exposed to the world. I believe it's also a major privacy violation. How will the school guarantee this?

A 1 – Just like every fall, you can choose not to have your child photographed or video-recorded by choosing to sign a consent form; also distance learning kids will have their own classes and will not be learning through live feeds into regular classes.

Q 2 – What if my child can physically not handle a mask all day. We've been trying and he itches his face constantly, defeating the purpose of a mask and putting him in sensory overload... increasing chances of aggressive behaviors and not setting him up for success.

A 2 – We recognize that some students will struggle wear masks. We will provide guidance to staff. We want a "what can we do" approach – perhaps try with 5 minutes/day, then 6 minutes/day, etc; We are putting a team together towards helping staff and families to support learning the skills of wearing a mask, hand washing, and physical distancing.