

TRUSTEES' COMMUNITY CONNECTION SERIES
QUESTIONS and RESPONSES – 2021 May 6

The following questions from the community were received during the *Trustees' Community Connection Series*. Please note that answers are provided below:

1. **Please provide data justifying masks on children and transmission in schools.**

The Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health establish the direction with respect to requirements for masking in our schools. The Thames Valley DSB and all other boards in the province of Ontario are expected to comply with the direction provided by our Chief Medical Officer of Health.

2. **Students across all grades have major gaps in their learning as a result of the Spring 2020 lockdown and subsequent virtual learning sessions.* What programs are in place - or what plans are being made - to assess and address critical gaps in student learning as a result of the pandemic? *Note: I would be happy to participate as a parent representative on a relevant planning committee or task force.**

Teachers across Thames Valley will make use of diagnostic and formative assessments to understand each and every student on an individual level. This individual information provides teachers with the opportunity to plan for whole class, small group and individual instruction for the students in their class. In addition, direct instruction and differentiated plans and assessment methods will support the needs of every student to be successful. Teachers will work to support students of all abilities with individualized supports from the classroom teacher, and further supports through the Learning Support Teachers (LSTs), Classroom Literacy Support Teachers (CLSTs), Student Success Teachers (SSTs), and the English as a Second Language (ESL) Teachers.

We always welcome our parents and caregivers to become involved at the school level on School Council or, where applicable, the school's Home and School Association.

3. **Are there any special considerations being proposed to assist full remote learning students with the transition back to in-person learning?**

For all students, our staff provide information about each student's knowledge, skills and abilities through comments on the Provincial Report Card. These are included in every student's Ontario Student Record (OSR) which is reviewed by upcoming teachers. This sharing of information, in addition to student profiles and transition meetings held at most schools, will support the sharing of information about remote learners with the staff at their home school.

In elementary Full Remote Learning, our students are being provided with the opportunity to complete a student reflection in their Google Drive that can be shared with

their In-Person teacher and staff as a transitional support document that includes student voice and input about their experience as a virtual learner this year.

4. **What if the student with special needs has anxiety or other barriers preventing him to use the camera during synchronous class that prevents the teacher to monitor his ability to follow and engage, and as the result he misses the materials as well as the social interaction and development. What can be done by the teacher, support team and parent to include that student into the remote learning process? P.S. When in person learning, the student is open for help and support.**

Every effort is to be made to connect with students and offer different strategies to support their learning needs. At times, teachers may offer 1:1 virtual opportunities to conference with students or a phone call to provide opportunities for consolidation or review. In addition, support staff may be accessed, with parental permission (for students under the age of 18), and professional staff can offer strategies to support social engagement and/ or integration into the online classroom.

5. **How does the board plan to work with families whose children/youth are exhibiting school avoidance behaviours?**

Efforts are being made at the school level to re-engage students and families who have become disconnected from education during the pandemic. Schools have been making direct contact with families to support a return to learning in Thames Valley. In addition, our professional staff have also been connecting regularly with students and families to provide support for engagement.

6. **What is being done to ensure the curriculum that has been removed this year is going to be taught next year? This is especially important to students in STEM classes or programs as they move forward. Grade 12 students will be adversely affected when applying to and going into College and University programs.**

Secondary teachers have emphasized the overall curriculum expectations, which serve as the foundation for content and skill development within each course. This will help to support students as they move into post-secondary programs. Post-secondary institutions are aware that remote learning during the pandemic will have impacted students' opportunity for hands-on learning opportunities during the shifts between learning models.

7. **How is the school board going to help our students be resilient when things are virtual?**

Our Mental Health portfolio has provided families and staff resources to support students as our learning models have changed throughout this school year. The information provided through School Mental Health Ontario has been shared with parent/caregiver groups and school teams, in addition to being provided on our TVDSB website. The

numerous resources have easy-to-use strategies to support well-being, resiliency and self-regulation.

8. What is being offered to the students to connect with one another then they can't be physically together?

Virtual clubs are happening in many schools to support student engagement opportunities outside of the classroom setting. In addition, schools and full remote programs have offered virtual announcements and family virtual school opportunities during the day and in the evening to allow students to connect online.

Are there mental health or hang outs set up for kids in the same class/grade to come together to talk whether in chat or just being able to see one another like they would at lunchtime?

For cyber security reasons, online chats supported by TVDSB are not available for students when teachers are not available for supervision. At schools during in-person learning, school staff are more readily available to provide supervision and support during non-instructional time.

Also how is the school system going to address the areas or gaps in learning for those going on to secondary school?

At the start of a secondary course, teachers use a variety of assessment tools to develop an understanding of the learning needs of the students. Teachers work collaboratively with other support staff at the school (e.g., Learning Support Teachers and Student Success teachers) to determine the best way to adapt programming to the varied needs of students in the class.

Would be interested in the general consensus of TVDSB staff on continuing online learning as an option moving forward as a new "normal". Basically, a mix of online and classroom after the pandemic?

Most students are best supported in an in-person learning model that allows for direct instruction, individualized in person support, access to school resources and spaces such as hands-on learning materials, Library Learning Commons, Arts and Physical Education spaces. The Ministry has not yet provided any direction on funding for a continued comprehensive online learning model for all students post-pandemic. Secondary students do have the option of taking online courses as part of their program through the Thames Valley e-learning program.

9. Will the curricula be modified for 2021/2022 school year to focus more on community/life skills and learning vs. book-learning to accommodate for the changed social climate in which we live and work? Specifically, more independent life skills and reliance on emotional balancing and needs that are self-directed in a socially isolated world.

The Ontario curriculum, except for recently revised Mathematics curricula, remains unchanged. The Ministry of Education sets the direction by releasing curriculum for staff to teach and assess; the Ministry is also responsible for regular revisions to the curriculum that reflect the needs of Ontario's students.

- 10. My child with Down Syndrome is in the regular classroom, not in special programming. He is not receiving face-to-face learning and is not suited for online education. What can be done to ensure all children with special learning needs are given every opportunity to succeed?**

All students' learning needs are to be met. Students with a placement in a regular classroom, will continue to receive direct instruction and support from the classroom teacher and applicable support staff. Regular communication and collaborative planning between caregivers/parents and the school team is encouraged to ensure the programming meets the individual needs of the student.

- 11. Will the 2021-2022 school year be offering online classes if the students would like to continue online learning or will the following year be in class only?**

For the 2021-2022 school year, all students will be offered the full range of learning experiences in In-Person Learning. Select experiences will be available in Full Remote Learning.

- 12. What type of mental health services are available in schools today and to what extent are Psychology Staff involved in providing these services?**

All formal mental health services are arranged through the school after consultation and consent from a parent/guardian; this work is completed by registered mental health professionals. Teachers are increasingly being trained in classroom level, trauma-sensitive and relationship-based approaches to encourage relationships and understanding. Through these approaches they create caring conditions for learning.

- 13. Why are students' school day timetables constantly changing? The timetable changed from first quad, to second, to third, to fourth quad. Is this based on empirical data, or Public Health recommendations?**

Student timetables have been created and adjusted by Thames Valley to comply with expectations from the local Health Units and the Ministry of Education.

On another note, I, like other parents had hoped the school start time could have been later. Much research has been done and shows that teenagers do better when their day starts later due to their biological clocks. Even starting at 8:45 or 9 am would greatly help, especially since their classroom time ends around 12:30 p.m.

The instructional day schedule has remained the same for our students to provide consistency, as much as possible, recognizing there are other changing factors such as the newly announced modified schedule. School boards have been required to make changes to timetables in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and expectations by the Ministry of Health and Education.

I would like to know what is the percentage of students who actually stay and make use of the Instructional Block, and is this something that can be changed if the percentage is low?

Study Hall was necessary in an Adapted Model where there were two separate cohorts of students. Attendance in Study Hall varied from day to day, and school to school. Students accessed this opportunity particularly at the end of each quadmester to assist with the consolidation of learning. Of note, the modified semester schedule planned for next year will not have separate cohorts or Study Hall.

- 14. When your child has been used to isolation and COVID-19 restrictions and remote learning for so long...how do you help them re-integrate back to the way things were before?**

Our students' well-being is important to us. We know that their success at school hinges on their wellness. Therefore, our plans to re-engage students include transition planning, use of support staff, activities that engage student voice (at the classroom and school level). Our staff are committed to knowing each and every student and supporting their needs, especially during this time of change as a result of the pandemic.

- 15. According to an interview with Mark Fisher from November 20, 2020, he stated "we have only had 1 case of transmission in our schools, which is amazing since we have 160 sites and almost 70,000 students". How does this number justify the mental anguish and suicide rates doctors around the world have been sounding the alarm for when the median infection survival rate of Covid, according to Stanford University is 99.77 % and according to the CDC, it poses less risks than the flu?**

We appreciate that this has been a challenging time for many of our TVDSB community members. We are committed to providing students with the supports they need and are pleased to be planning to have all students who have opted for in-person learning return to our schools, full-time in September 2021.

- 16. When the Province allows students to go back to in class learning, will the schools consider full time learning, not the way it has been done with the quadmester system and school 2-3 days a week? I know other boards have offered full day learning in school boards like Grand Erie District School Board (Brant).**

Effective September 2021, our secondary students who have opted for in-person learning will be attending full days following a modified semester schedule. This information has recently been communicated with to our secondary students and their families.

- 17. Why are fabric masks being given to children unwashed? Plastic bags always say to wash masks first, the logic that the school can't read Chinese is unacceptable.**

Our students are encouraged to bring their own masks to school each day. For those students who require masks we do keep a supply in all of our schools.

- 18. Why not recruit from other countries where French is a primary language?**

The recruitment of qualified French language teachers is being done within Canada and internationally as well.

- 19. What, if any assistance will be provided to FRL students to help them reintegrate into classrooms?**

Every time we pivot back to in person learning we provide resources to staff on relationship building skills. We take the time to rebuild community and routine before jumping back into learning to foster the necessary conditions for students to learn. Over the summer, our Mental Health and Safe Schools/Equity teams will be working with School Mental Health Ontario to prepare resources for September 2021. We have dedicated part of the professional activity day prior to school start-up to ensure consistent messaging and delivery of these critical supports.

For students with special education needs, summer programs are offered to help with personalized transition supports.

- 20. I would like to know what you will be doing in the future to deal with mental health issues when kids return to school?**

The board has access to increased funding and staffing levels over the next school year. This will be used to:

- enhance trauma-sensitive practices within the school and system including socio-emotional Learning in classrooms;*
- ensure equitable access to mental health services within the system and support pathways to community care; and*
- Strengthen engagement with students, families, staff and community.*

