

A Reopening That Works for Schools, Children and Families

Whereas, publicly funded education is the backbone of a progressive and inclusive society; and

Whereas, the health and welfare of children and society are linked to investment in a strong public education system; and

Whereas, remote learning, which cannot replace in-person instruction long term, poses significant risks to the mental health and well-being of children, inhibits developmentally-appropriate socialization, and challenges effective delivery of special education services; and

Whereas, several Canadian authorities on children's health have raised significant concerns about the risks of keeping children in remote-learning scenarios long-term¹; and

Whereas, school boards must take their direction from the Provincial Government and the Minister of Education; and

Whereas, the Ministry of Education has directed boards to plan for three possible models, with the final direction coming from both the Ministry and Toronto Public Health in August; and

Whereas, the TDSB has formed a Return to School and Work Steering Committee and several sub-committees to plan and prepare for a safe and healthy start to school in September as required by the Provincial Government directive, and has endeavoured to seek input from students, parents/caregivers and staff to inform the plan as well as directly involving Toronto Public Health; and

Whereas, even though Boards were directed to work on three options, the Ministry is expecting Boards to begin September with the 'hybrid/adaptive model'; and

Whereas, this effectively means students are in school only part-time, and continuing some degree of remote learning for the remainder; and

¹ Canadian Paediatric Society, "Supporting a Safe Return to School for Canada's Children and Youth", https://www.cps.ca/uploads/advocacy/Supporting_a_Safe_Return_to_School.pdf; SickKids, "Covid 19: Recommendations for School Reopening", <http://www.sickkids.ca/PDFs/About-SickKids/81407-COVID19-Recommendations-for-School-Reopening-SickKids.pdf>; UNICEF CANADA, The Impact of Covid-19 on Children in Canada: Short, Medium and Long-Term Mitigation Strategies", [The impact of COVID-19 on children in Canada: short, medium and long-term mitigation strategies](#).

Whereas, this model places a tremendous burden on parents and caregivers -- and, in particular, women, families with young children and low-income families, and, stands to further jeopardize the economic recovery; and

Whereas, the TDSB is committed to providing the best educational experience possible under the circumstances and directions given by the Province; and

Whereas, we acknowledge planning for the return to school and workplaces is a complex task with many considerations; including that COVID-19 can pose significant health risks, and that information about the virus is constantly evolving; and

Whereas, the health and safety of students and staff need to be prioritized yet balanced with the needs of families; and

Whereas, exceptional circumstances call for creative thinking and emergency funding beyond the control of the TDSB itself; and

Therefore, be it resolved:

- (a) That the Chair write to the Minister of Education and the Premier of Ontario to express the Board's concern that the current Back to School Recovery plan, and the "hybrid" or "adapted" model, in particular, leave working parents with young children, single-parent households, and low-income families in the precarious position of having to choose between educating their children and their own employment;
- (b) That the letter at Part (a) include the following:

As an urban school board with significant space constraints, we believe that a full and measured emergency response to the Covid-19 pandemic and recovery/reopening requires an ambitious and creative plan that supports communities, families, and children, and prioritizes investment in public education by:

- (i) Developing a larger and more robust staffing plan to accommodate getting as many students as possible, as soon as possible, back into physical schools/spaces, while respecting public health advice,
- (ii) Providing temporary, emergency funding to ensure that part (b) i) can be accomplished safely and effectively and in the best interest of all families and communities,

- (iii) Providing, as previously requested in our Board's letter to the Minister of Education on May 22, 2020,² the necessary funding supports to School Boards for all extra Covid-19 costs including PPE, additional staffing, additional transportation, IT devices, mental health and well-being supports, cleaning supplies and repair/maintenance including, but not limited to, ventilation issues, touch-free sinks and soap dispensers for handwashing, and water bottle refill stations;
- (c) That Chair also write to the Prime Minister and the Mayor of Toronto to encourage their collaboration on other funding, policies and programs that allow children and families to participate fully in the reopening and to keep children safe, social and learning, including:
 - (i) Greater federal, provincial and municipal funding, infrastructure and support for childcare to ensure financial stability in the sector and fund the opening of a greater number of affordable, accessible spaces under social distancing parameters;
 - (ii) Paid parental leave options for parents/guardians whose ability to participate in the workforce is hindered by the lack of complete school/childcare options for their child(ren);
- (d) That the following be copied on the letters at Parts (a) and (b) above:
 - (i) Ontario Public School Boards' Association,
 - (ii) Chairs of all Ontario School Boards,
 - (iii) All Toronto City Councillors,
 - (iv) All Toronto Members of Parliament
 - (v) All Toronto Members of Provincial Parliament.

² <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/News/Article-Details/ArtMID/474/ArticleID/1463/Letter-to-the-Minister-Transition-Funding->