

Meeting Notes

Ward 20 and Ward 21
Virtual Joint Forum on Return to School
Monday, August 30, 2021

Dear Friends,

Thank you to the parents, community members and staff who attended our August 30th ward forum on the 2021 School Reopening Plan. We appreciate your questions and will continue to provide you with the latest updates as they come along. Much of this process involves decisions and advice from the Ministry of Education and Toronto Public Health. As we await further information, please refer to the PowerPoint presentation and meeting minutes to clarify any questions you may have.

Please see below for the minutes from our meeting.

Meeting Date/Time: August 30, 2021, 6:30 – 9:00 PM

Meeting Location: Virtual Zoom Meeting hosted by Trustee Manna Wong and Trustee Yalini Rajakulasingam

Number of Attendees: Approx. 160 participants

Staff and Trustees In Attendance: Cassandra Alviani-Alvarez (Superintendent of Education), Courtney Lewis (Superintendent of Education), Elizabeth Addo (Superintendent of Education), Helen Fisher (Superintendent of Education), Lisa Dilworth (Superintendent of Education), (Shirley Chan (Superintendent of Education), Sheryl Robinson Petrazzini (Superintendent of Education), Manna Wong (Trustee), Yalini Rajakulasingam (Trustee), Cathine Chung (Interpreter), Tania Jabbar (Trustee's Office Shared Services Liaison)

Items Discussed:

Link to the presentation:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1THwE_RWxrgsn5DzEyXGJEdmFzSnNj8rO/view?usp=sharing

Additional Resources: <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/School-Year-2021-22/Pandemic-Recovery-Plan>

1. Land Acknowledgement
2. Survey Results
3. Technology
4. PPE/Ventilation/HEPA
5. Gym class & extracurricular activities
6. Learning Hub Model
7. Special education & new secondary model
8. Transportation

9. Lunch Routine
10. Assemblies
11. Music
12. French

Questions & Answers:

Q. Why are we allowing polling stations in our schools? There are empty churches, stores, libraries, community centres, etc. that would be better options 8 days into the new school year with cases on the rise and no vaccine mandate for voters or staff. What's the risk of exposure to school staff and students?

A. The province makes decisions for where the polling stations are located. Ontario Chief Medical Officer will advise on whether or not schools should be used. Schools have the intention to separate the polling population.

Q. What specific steps are being taken to keep our kids safe at school from COVID19 delta variant? What sanitation protocols are being followed on a daily basis?

A. Caretaking staff will continue practicing deep cleaning of school spaces and high-touch surfaces on a frequent basis. It is difficult to adhere to the 2 metre distance in TDSB spaces as some classrooms are not big enough across different schools. Staff and children will need to do a self-screening before they come to school. TDSB is still working on a mandated vaccination policy for staff.

Q. What is the status of ventilation in the school given that the buildings and infrastructure are quite old?

A. All ventilation has been up to date now, with some schools having extra portable HEPA filters. There will definitely continue to be enhanced cleaning by caretaking staff. Students will remain in cohorts and will avoid crossing over.

Q. Are there any changes to classroom caps?

A. The same CAPs remain in physical and virtual schools so there is an opportunity for virtual classes to have the same opportunities as students doing in-person learning. Classroom caps are determined by the province.

Q. What is the process if a student / staff gets a COVID positive test? How long do they not attend school? How do the students catch up on the missed work?

A. The TDSB follows Toronto Public Health Guidelines. The duration of your absence from school depends on how many people in the household are vaccinated. Teachers will work with students to keep them updated on classwork.

Q. Are vaccines mandatory for students 12 and up?

A. Students who are currently 11 years old, and turning 12 by December 31, are eligible for vaccinations. We encourage all students 12 and up to get vaccinated. Vaccines are currently not mandatory.

Q. As COVID cases continue to increase, is there an earlier chance for children to be switched to virtual school?

A. Families must wait until February 2022 to make the switch. This will allow the TDSB enough time to make decisions on organizing and allocating resources/staff.

Q. Are social workers allowed to enter school helping children when school reopen in September?

A. Yes, there will be further clarification once the operational guidelines are sent out. They would be included in the vaccination policy once it gets rolled out.

Q. My 19 year old son has a special need that has fragile and compromised immunity and is totally dependent on his care. He cannot wear a mask at all because of his chronic lung disease. My question is what are the set of rules and guidelines to protect his health to go in person at school?

A. There are exceptions for students with certain health conditions. The best thing to do is work in collaboration with the principal of the school to see if there are any additional considerations that need to be taken in place. There are exceptions on the policy for masks, and it is important to collaborate with the school.

Q. Getting tested is a traumatic experience. Is there any update about getting rapid testing without saliva?

A. At this time health officials and the board are working on a solution. We acknowledge that there is trauma involved in the disparities in health care among various communities.

Q. Can parents meet their teachers online before school starts? Will there be open houses?

A. Parents still cannot visit classrooms or the school setting any time soon. Teachers are working hard to communicate with parents in the weeks to come. Quite often, most schools collect email addresses and work via email. Most principals send out communication bi-weekly or monthly to keep parents updated. There were many virtual open houses last year, where parents got the opportunity to meet teaching staff.

Q. If a student has to stay home due to COVID-19, can they join virtual schools in the meantime?

A. The TDSB does not have the technology for students to join a virtual classroom while they are at home, but the teacher will ensure that they are kept up to date and given things to work on at home.

Q. Why is the selection data separated between high school and elementary?

A. The results are separate between elementary and high school because student developmental stages are different as well. Elementary students are more dependent on teachers, while secondary students can work more independently. Although there was a huge number of people who did not provide a response, the TDSB had a team that worked on calling as many parents as they could to get responses.

Q. Will class sizes be capped to a smaller number due to COVID in secondary schools?

A. The classroom caps will remain the same, however they will be cohorted into four different classes over the two week period. Secondary schools are extremely safe, with multiple mask breaks. Classrooms are already set up where desks are a metre apart from each other.

Q. Are there any concerns of parents/caregivers who are unvaccinated?

A. There is a major gap in vaccination rates among 20-29 year olds. It is important for folks to be mindful that many students live in multigenerational households and we encourage everyone to get vaccinated.

Q. How will students who rely on the TTC be able to maintain a safe distance?

A. We will continue to have conversations with students and staff to stack layers of protection such as wearing masks and sanitization outside of school.

Q. Will students receive agendas?

A. This depends on their school. Please get in touch with the principal or teachers.

Q. Will a vaccination policy be finalized before school starts?

A. At the moment, there is a mandatory disclosure for teachers and staff.

Q. When will students receive timetables?

A. Secondary students will receive something on September 7.

Q. How will science practicals and labs work in virtual schools?

A. Students in a virtual classroom cannot come into school to perform labs. Teachers in virtual schools are working hard to provide alternatives. The TDSB is working hard for in-person extra-curricular activities to include students from virtual schools.

Q. Are classroom caps different for students in portables?

A. They are not different.

Q. Can my child attend virtual school even if they are currently outside the country?

A. If they were in a previous virtual school in the TDSB, there is a high likelihood that they can. Please get in touch with the school.

Q. Are adjustments being made around instruction and assessment that would level out the experience for kids with learning challenges? How are teachers going to be desensitized to strong opinions or self-advocacy from children?

A. Educators are spending a lot of time engaging in assessment with consideration to well-being, equity, and belonging in the school. Teachers are working on how to engage students who are returning from virtual schools. they will continue building on their independence and learning how to find their voice in a modality that may be new to them. Trustees are working on a Covid-19 recovery plan through an equity lens, focusing on underserved students and communities. This will address disparities and inequities that have been further amplified during this pandemic. The TDSB continues to ensure student voices are being heard.