



Meeting Date/Time: August 9, 2021 5:30 – 7:00 pm

Joint Ward Forum (Wards 8 & 11) – Return to School:

Zoom, hosted by Trustees Laskin & Chernos Lin

Attendees:

Trustees: Rachel Chernos Lin (Ward 11, Don Valley West), Shelley Laskin (Ward 8, Eglinton-Lawrence and Toronto-St. Paul's). Also in attendance: Trustees Doyle (Ward 14, Don Valley East) & MacLean (Ward 2, Etobicoke Centre), and former Don Valley West Trustee, Gerri Gershon.

Staff: Andrew Howard (Superintendent LN5), Ron Felsen (Superintendent, LN6), Denise Humphreys (Superintendent, LN4), Wilmar Kortleever (Shared Services Liaison/notes)

Parents-Caregivers/Students/Staff/Community members: 170 people attended

VIRTUAL WARD FORUM NOTES

1. Welcome & Introductions

After the land acknowledgement, Trustees Laskin & Chernos Lin welcomed everybody who took time out of their summer holidays for this Ward Forum. This meeting is to provide as much information as possible about the *Return to School in September*, as parents/caregivers are to decide by Thursday, August 12, whether their students will attend in-school, or virtually.

First off, it must be said that the Toronto District School Board is still waiting for a lot of information. Based on the Ministry Guidelines that came out only last week, staff is working with Toronto Public Health to operationalize much of it. The Guidelines need to be made specific for Toronto, and for our individual school circumstances.

Many great questions were submitted that we do not necessarily have answers to yet. Please be assured that where we cannot answer specifically, we are taking all questions back to staff, and hope to provide fuller answers later in updated Q&As (Questions & Answers – see also below), or perhaps in another Ward Forum in upcoming weeks.

A first set of questions have been answered by Staff as recently as today. More will be added as they are completed and the operational guidelines for schools will be updated once we hear from Toronto Public Health (TPH). TDSB takes the advice from TPH on health and safety issues.

PLEASE NOTE: ON August 9, 2021 TDSB Staff posted an updated School Year 2021-22 Q&A (Questions and Answers) section on the Board website. It can be found here: <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/School-Year-2021-22/Questions-and-Answers>. This Q&A covers subjects like Secondary Schools (the Modified Semester, Hybrid learning); the Selection Form (switching learning models, changing selections); Virtual Learning (technology, optional attendance); Health & Safety (school measures, lunch); Vaccinations (clinics, mandates); Covid-19 in Schools; Masks; Ventilation.

2. Questions (both pre-submitted, and asked in the Zoom chat)

- **What is virtual learning going to look like if there is no separate Virtual School like last year?**

Superintendent Howard: Firstly, the selection of either in-person learning or virtual learning that parents/caregivers are asked to make by August 12 is a commitment for the school year. There will be only one opportunity to change models, which is for the second semester (second half of the year in elementary and for second semester in secondary school) in February. There are still different options of what Virtual Learning may look like as it is dependent on the number of students and how many per grade selecting virtual learning, because it will vary from school to school and community to community. If there is a large enough number of students in a particular school choosing virtual learning, the school will be able to provide one of their teachers to provide that learning. Another option is a hub model, where virtual classes are created from a certain number of students in one school, and an additional number of students from other schools in the community. For that, Superintendents and Principals in a neighbouring area would work together to create a hub between, for example 3, 4, or 5 schools, with a teacher from one of those schools providing the virtual learning. A third option is *Simultaneous (or hybrid) Learning*.

Trustee Laskin: Depending on the percentages of parents that choose virtual learning for their children, current staffing may cover the teachers necessary to teach virtually. That said, TDSB Trustees are discussing whether an additional budget allocation for teachers will be needed to avoid simultaneous learning, which is where a teacher teaches students in a classroom as well as online, at the same time. This is a discussion that is to come soon, and some Trustees as well as people in this meeting have been pretty vocal about the concerns associated with the simultaneous learning model. At this point staff cannot say this is not an option..

Selection Responses: As per Tuesday, August 9, more than 110,000 responses to the Selection Form had been recorded, which is just under 50%. About 89% of the responses are for in-person learning. If these numbers stay the same, TDSB is quite hopeful that there will be enough teaching staff to facilitate both learning models within the current budget.

Trustee Chernos Lin: Another change compared to last year that is important to realize is that without a separate Virtual School, virtual students will hopefully have a closer relationship with their local school, because they will be taught by either a home school teacher, or in a hub with neighbouring students.

Superintendent Howard: To clarify about the hubs: they can be expanded in size/area. They could be with some neighbouring schools, or with schools in a particular learning network, or even neighbouring learning networks. The challenge is that a teacher needs to be freed up from one of the schools to provide the virtual learning in the hub. Exact class sizes are not known yet, as they depend on the numbers of people choosing virtual learning vs. in-person learning, and other considerations including public health and safety.

Trustee Chernos Lin: It is unclear at this moment, for example, whether we will again have schools, like last year, that were deemed higher risk by Toronto Public Health, and had their class sizes capped. That direction has not been given for this year, and we have not been provided

additional funds, so currently boards have been asked to staff schools as if it were a regular school year. (Full Day Kindergarten: System average class size no greater than 26.0. Classes are capped at 29 students - 10% of classes are permitted to exceed the cap to a maximum of 31; Grades 1-3: Classes are capped at 20 students - 10% of classes are permitted to exceed the cap to a maximum of 23 students; Grade 3/4 Combined Grade: Classes are capped at 23 students; Grade 4-8: System average class size no greater than 24.5. There is no maximum class size required by regulation for individual class sizes in grades 4-8, only system averages; Secondary classroom teachers will be initially allocated based on Ministry of Education funded average class size of 23.0.)

- **What will be the lunch time routine?**

Trustee Chernos Lin: Question - In Elementary schools, students ate in their classrooms last year, but the Ministry Guidance says that cafeterias can be opened again, do we have guidance on this yet or are we waiting for TPH guidelines?

Superintendent Howard: We have not received clarity on the lunch time routines, because we are awaiting direction from Toronto Public Health. But based on the Ministry Guidelines, one new element is that children will be allowed to go home for lunch. If cafeterias are to be opened, one would assume that students will sit there in their cohorts, if at all possible. But we are still waiting on direction. Obviously, we want to encourage going outside as much as possible. Many elementary schools in the TDSB do not have a cafeteria that accommodates all students. Another aspect to consider is supervision during lunch. Local schools will develop models based on system-wide guidelines.

Superintendent Felsen: In high schools we do not anticipate students will be eating in the cafeteria in large numbers. There are virtually no secondary schools in the TDSB that can accommodate all students. Certainly, for the fall, many can eat outside, and as Superintendent Howard said, they can go home if they are in their local community. I envision there will also be more flexibility given the circumstances, to have students spread out and have lunches in hallways or large spaces like gymnasiums.

- **Will there be vaccine requirements?**

Trustee Chernos Lin: *Another popular questions was with respect to mandatory vaccinations.* At this point, the Ministry of Education has not given any indication that there will be mandatory vaccination requirements for either staff or students 12 and older. Parents have also asked whether they can ask about whether the teacher is vaccinated, and, informally, there is no reason you cannot ask. However, nobody has to disclose their vaccination status. Likewise, students can discuss vaccination, but nobody can be forced to tell their status either way.

Trustee Laskin: It is not the TDSB, not even Toronto Public Health, who decides about mandatory vaccinations - that instruction has to come from the government.

Trustee Chernos Lin: There are other mandatory vaccines for schools, but at this time, Covid is not one of them. We are strongly encouraging people to get vaccinated, and a lot of clinics are

organized in schools to make vaccines accessible. Vaccination Clinic Information is on the [TDSB website](#).

Trustee Laskin: For example, Fairbank PS will have a clinic on August 12 & 13, and more information about other clinics will be in the Trustees' newsletters.

Superintendent Howard: Schools will not be able to accommodate requests that students be placed in classes with vaccinated teachers. Nor, at this point, will we necessarily have school by school (let alone classroom by classroom) vaccination rates from TPH. Everybody needs to make their decision based on their own comfort level and health/safety considerations.

- **Risk mitigation**

Trustee Chernos Lin: It is important to acknowledge that the goal is to keep schools open and make them as safe as possible. TDSB has put a lot of risk mitigation measures in place. For example, like last year, TDSB will be requiring masks for all students, staff and visitors including Kindergarten students – even as the Ministry Guidance only says recommended. Masks will be provided (a three-ply non-medical grade mask for students will be provided where needed); and medical grade masks will be required for school staff as well.

Ventilation: In addition to improving the existing ventilation systems (through upgrades, turning them up, running them longer, and changing filters more often), last year TDSB brought in industrial HEPA filter air filtration units for all occupied classrooms. That will still be the case, and TDSB has purchased additional units for additional rooms that we expect to be occupied for the coming year. This goes beyond the Ministry requirements (which is HEPA filters only in rooms that lack mechanical ventilation). These will also be provided for gymnasiums, libraries, etc.

Trustee Laskin: TDSB will provide a media presentation on Wednesday (August 10) of Ventilation in schools - look out for it. Research has shown that the industrial-grade HEPA filters that the TDSB is using are doing a good job, when used along with masks.

- **Will volunteers be allowed back in schools?**

Trustee Chernos Lin/Superintendents Howard & Felsen: that is currently unknown. Central Board staff is currently forming Committees on all operational matters, and this is one question to be considered as part of that work.

- **Will there be Asymptomatic testing for Covid? And what will be the protocol for positive cases?**

Unfortunately, no details are available yet, as we are awaiting guidance from Toronto Public Health. But our hope is that there will be testing available in schools for students to take home.

- **It is difficult to decide between in-person and virtual learning with so much information unavailable?**

Trustees & Superintendents: We totally understand, and very much empathize. Unfortunately, the Ministry guidance came out only last week, and it is a lot to sift through even with staff coming back from holidays for it. Much of the operational details will depend on guidance from

Toronto Public Health. Rest assured we will continue to share the information as soon as we get it. And we will continue to follow guidance from Toronto Public Health. There will of course be local variations, based on specific circumstances in schools and communities, so that is what staff is working on very hard.

Superintendent Felsen: We are also incorporating a lot of Mental Health initiatives, recognizing these difficult circumstances, and incorporating them as students and staff transition back into schools.

Trustee Laskin: TDSB is organizing a session [Back to School: Supporting Transitions and Re-Engagement](#) on September 1 from 6:30-8, which we will advertise in future communications. Unfortunately, TDSB cannot postpone the selection form between virtual and in-person learning beyond this week, because we need time to prepare for the start of the school year, including staffing and letting teachers know what and where they will be teaching. We do not want to, like last year, be forced to postpone the school reopening. Originally the selection form was scheduled for June, but we decided to postpone it so that parents could make a more informed decision anticipating the Ministry instruction in July. Unfortunately Ministry instruction only came last week.

Trustee Chernos Lin: We know this is a difficult decision for many but remember we do have more information than last June, in terms of vaccine availability and rollout, for both students 12 and up and for the general population.

- **Given the rise in Covid, and developments we see for example in the United States, what happens with if a family decides to go with in-person learning and then changes their mind and pull their child out of class? Can they move to virtual?**

Unfortunately, this week's form selection choice cannot be changed until February. Thankfully, most teachers have become very adept with online platforms, so information for learning from home will likely be available. Unfortunately, there will not be simultaneous learning going along with that. Obviously, if circumstances change for the worse Toronto Public Health may necessitate entire classes, schools, or more to pivot back to online, including teachers. You cannot withdraw your child from in-person learning and expect them to learn remotely with their classroom teacher.

- **What will the Modified Semester in Secondary look like?**

Trustee Chernos Lin: we have received a lot of feedback on last year's quadesters, and TDSB has advocated with the Ministry about returning to traditional semesters. However, the Ministry direction is to keep high schools limited to maximum two cohorts per day, and minimum 48 hours between changing cohorts, so we have landed on 'Modified Semesters'. There are many people who feel that regular Semesters should be possible especially if cohorts can mix for extra-curriculars and lunch, but that is a Ministry decision.

Superintendent Felsen: Modified Semesters are an improvement over quadesters – which many Boards in the Province are in fact sticking with for the coming Fall (not to mention the

Octomesters that some Boards had last year). The Modified Semester means that you have two courses one week, and two other courses the following week, alternating for half of the school year. One course would be in the morning, the other in the afternoon. There are advantages and disadvantages to all models. Thankfully, many of the concerns we heard about the Quadmasters are addressed in the Modified Semester model, including the length of the courses (18-20 weeks instead of 9-10), special education support through the learning strategies course, and teacher workload (through having a prep period per semester, instead of one only every second Quadmaster). We are working on implementation of the Modified Semester system, including letting teachers know that they are not to provide homework for the week in between teaching, and then schedule a Test on the following Monday. The Ministry has also announced flexibility in evaluation, so individual teaches, classes, or boards can decide whether to re-instate end of term exams that people have asked about.

Trustee Chernos Lin: One advantage of having Modified Semesters is that, if Covid allows, this provides the opportunity to return to regular semesters for the second half of the year.

- **Is 45 minutes enough for lunch in Secondary Schools?**

Superintendent Felsen: The length of the lunch was discussed with our federation partners (unions) when we landed on this model, because a minimum of 40 minutes is a contractual requirement. One of the concerns of lengthening the lunch period is the risk of additional congregating by students, which raises health and safety concerns. We would like people to stay in their cohorts as much as possible. However, it is anticipated most secondary students will be vaccinated.

- **Will Extra-curriculars return, and if so, how?**

We are awaiting further guidance from Toronto Public Health. Please do note that virtually all extracurriculars are provided by teachers and staff on a voluntary basis. These are not mandated, and hopefully the Covid situation will provide enough security and comfort for staff to volunteer.

- **Will students be able to get enough Community Hours to fulfill the graduation requirement?**

Superintendent Felsen: The Ministry has again lowered the requirement from 40 hours to 20. Opportunities have also been expanded and include many virtual options.

- **Will students who have to quarantine have access to their online class in secondary school?**

Superintendent Felsen: We anticipate that there will be an online presence for all classes, whether that will be via Google Classroom or Brightspace, or other. However, there is no expectation that they'll have a video link with the class.

- **Will classes pivot to online in case of extreme heat or snow days?**

Superintendent Felsen: We are required to develop an operational procedure for this.

- **Can we have outdoor lunches?**

Superintendent Howard: this is mostly a local decision, because every school is very different in terms of size, room availability, number of students going home for lunch, and so on. A lot will likely be similar to last year, except for where cafeterias may now be available.

Trustee Chernos Lin: The changed guidelines do provide some new and exciting opportunities, for example libraries being accessible again.

Trustee Laskin: Staff is currently working on the plan to provide these common rooms, that have students in them all day, with HEPA units – 2 or 3 even if required given the size of the room.

- **Will there be masking for indoor sports and music? And outdoor recess/activities?**

Whereas the Ministry Guidelines indicate these activities could go ahead maskless if students are distanced, we are awaiting guidance from Toronto Public Health on this. Currently TDSB requires masks for all in school. Obviously, outdoor activities carry far less risk. The Ministry Guidance introduced the option of mixing cohorts outdoors. Guidance is forthcoming on that as well, but many people including educators have welcomed this idea because the cohorting outdoors was very restrictive socially. Either way, much can still change during the year as well, as it did last year, based on changing circumstances and risk assessment.

- **Why is school starting on Thursday this year?**

For a stable start of the new school year, it is important for most if not all students and staff to start at the same time, and the Tuesday and Wednesday after Victoria Day are Jewish High Holidays where many Jewish staff would be absent, and having to be substituted on these first days of school. The School Calendar Committee has confirmed this still leaves the appropriate number of school days in the year.

- **Will TDSB publish vaccination numbers per school?**

Superintendent Felsen: Currently, we do not have that information. We cannot ask students for it, and it is not clear whether Toronto Public Health has the full data either. We will be publishing positive cases, as we did last year. And we will ask Toronto Public Health if they can provide this data for us.

4. Closing

Trustees Chernos Lin & Laskin thanked everybody for attending. Please send any questions that you did not see answered to either or both of the Trustees, and stay tuned for more information & further meetings. Please note that school offices open on August 23 (for secondary schools) and August 30 (for elementary schools), and Principals will be available to answer questions about local, operational matters as of those dates, respectively.

Please see scroll down to next page for additional questions from the chat...

August 9, 2021 Joint Ward Forum Chat Comments and Questions perhaps not (or partially) answered:

(Many of these cannot be answered until Toronto Public Health (TPH) guidance comes in or operational decisions are finalized). *Answers are italicized.*

- Will TDSB be renting spaces out to other after school program organizations? *TBD*
- Based on the percentage attending in person last year in these two wards (86%+), what are the chances to have a dedicated class per grade or even mix grade online? *This is hard to say but multi-grade classes are certainly likely.*
- What % chose virtual last year from Ward11? Was it > 50%? *This varied across the ward significantly, with close to 50% virtual in Thorncliffe Park, and less than 10% in Leaside, for example.*
- Are overnight field trips permitted? This is for grade 7. *TBD*
- If a 4th wave emerges (the Delta variant is impacting kids more so than the original strain - more pronounced symptoms and hospitalizations) what is the plan? Will we be able to pull our unvaccinated u12's out of in-person should outbreaks occur? Any news from Public Health re: vaccines for u12's? *Switch dates are in February. We have not been updated on expected timing of vaccines for younger children.*
- Can you guarantee all classrooms will have HEPA filters day one? *Yes*
- As an employer, you can choose to mandate vaccination or weekly tests from staff like UHN did, why don't you do this? *Unfortunately this is not within our ability – it is a provincial decision.*
- Some schools who were supplied classroom units were unable to use them because the school building couldn't handle the electrical load. Will those schools electrical be updated? *That is our understanding, but we will check. We have not heard this, so if you can reach out to us directly with your school's name, we will look into this.*
- RE: Equity and a Positive School Climate. Vaccination status may be stigmatizing information for students and staff to share. TDSB may need to look at a system wide communication practice/ protocol that does not stigmatize students. At the same time there should be ongoing communication encouraging vaccination and sharing information about where and how to be vaccinated. *We will do our best not to stigmatize anyone.*
- There will be different health protocol responses for vaccinated and unvaccinated students. Will TDSB ensure that students are not exposed to being stigmatized due to their vaccination status? *We have not yet been advised of the specific protocol, but should this be the case we will do our best.*
- Will there be differences for unvaxxed vs vaxxed staff and students if there is a case in the class/ cohort? *TBD*
- Dr Moore had indicated week earlier than if + cases in class, vaccinated kids can return right away with -ve test whereas unvaccinated have to maintain 10 day home quarantine and return with two -ve tests. Back to school plan does not clearly indicate what expectation is. *We are awaiting information with respect to protocols.*

- Any directions released yet about school nutrition/lunch programs? May they run again this fall?
TBD
- When will we hear about whether it will be school or LN hubs, or hybrid learning? *Before school starts.*
- The mask break is concerning for me since morning recess was eliminated in middle school. Will there be a mask break or would you consider adding a recess for that purpose? *There can be mask breaks but this will be determined at the local level.*
- Will there be cafeteria services in secondary schools? *TBD*
- Is anything being done re: ventilation in bathrooms and toilet seats that close? *TBD*
- Will kids be able to opt out of more high risk activities such as singing / wind instruments, contact sports in gym class, etc. *TBD*
- Can parents be given an opt-out option if there is mask-less music and indoor gym *TBD*
- Our five neighbourhood public schools, 2 junior highs and one high school had next to no cases last year but had to close with everyone else in Toronto. Dr. Moore seems to feel no school should close... so far. Can different areas in Toronto be treated differently if it comes to that? *TBD*
- In the modified semester, why isn't course 1 and 2 switching am/pm? Having a course only in the am or conversely only in the pm, this may hit students very hard. *We cannot flip morning and afternoon classes as there are some teachers who have .5 assignments.*
- What is the process for letting a class/cohort know there is a positive case in the classroom? Last year it took a long period of time for the information to be shared with the community. Therefore spread had already occurred. Have you heard if this process going to changed by the board or TPH? *TBD*
- I'm going to keep pushing this question, why won't you definitively mandate masks everywhere indoors? you were able to for jk/sk without government input, why not everything else?
Currently the rule in place is that TDSB has mandated masks indoors, based on a motion passed by trustees last summer. Should we hear that guidance is changing, trustees can consider next steps.
- My daughter will be attending Hodgson this year. We were expecting a welcome video/parent guide but didn't receive it in June. Is this forthcoming? *Please check with the school on August 30th, the date when elementary schools reopen.*