



DOWNEY DIGEST

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A NOTE FROM DOUG

Summer is a busy time here in Barrie-Springwater-Oro-Medonte. As we move through August, many thoughts shift to the return to school this September. Below you will find an overview of the Ontario back-to-school plan. If you have any questions or concerns, need further clarification or help navigating, please don't hesitate to reach out to my office for assistance.

I hope you all have had a chance to enjoy the beautiful weather and some of the incredible things our communities have to offer this time of year. Watch for the September issue of the Downey Digest for a lookback on all of our summer highlights.

BACK TO SCHOOL PLAN

Recently, the Ontario Government released the back to school plan for 2021-2022.

The return to classroom plan focuses on supporting the health, safety and well-being of students, families and staff.

As the school year unfolds, the Ministry of Education will continue to monitor ongoing risks related to variants of concern and the ongoing COVID situation province wide.



ELEMENTARY

Elementary schools will reopen with conventional in-person delivery of learning, with enhanced health and safety protocols, province-wide.

Students will remain in one cohort for the full school day, and cohorted classes will stay together with one teacher, where possible.

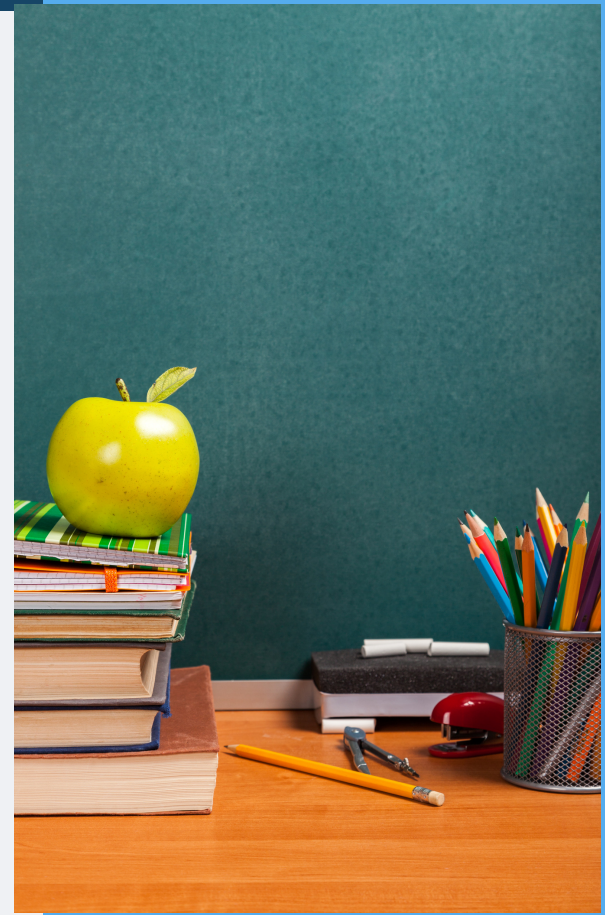
Students may use common spaces, like cafeterias and libraries, and interact with members of different cohorts outside with distancing encouraged, or inside with distancing and masking. Masks are not required outside.

SECONDARY

Secondary schools will provide daily in-person learning for the full duration of the school day.

For the fall semester, school boards have been instructed to timetable students with no more than two courses at a time. Some school boards may implement the alternating week model, with support from the local health unit.

It is important all models allow secondary students to earn compulsory credits required for the Ontario Secondary School Diploma.



REMOTE LEARNING

Remote learning remains an option for parents even as school boards are planning for students to return to in-person learning. School boards will be required to provide students with 300 minutes of learning opportunities per day.

To be prepared for a potential closure, school boards should have plans in place so they can move to remote learning quickly, to ensure continuity of learning for students. Staff, students and families should be aware of the school board's remote learning plan, should the need arise to move to remote learning in the event of classroom, school or board closure.

PROTECTIVE STRATEGIES

School boards and schools are expected to employ multiple protective strategies and a layering of controls to support healthier and safer environments for students and staff.

There is not one specific measure that will prevent transmission from occurring in schools, but rather there are multiple structural and individual elements that contribute to making schools healthier spaces and reduce the risk of infection to in-person attendees.



PROTECTIVE STRATEGIES

- Screening
 - All staff and students must self-screen everyday.
- Student masks
 - Students grades 1 to 12 are required to wear masks indoors at school.
- Staff PPE
 - School boards will continue to provide school staff, bus drivers, bus monitors and student aides with required PPE, including medical masks, eye protection and other PPE based on specific job functions.
- Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette
 - Schools should train students on appropriate hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, including use of alcohol-based hand rub to reinforce its use.

PROTECTIVE STRATEGIES

- Distancing and congregating
 - Schools are encouraged to remove unnecessary furniture and place desks with as much distancing as possible, and allow teachers as much teaching space as possible. Periods of student movement should be staggered.
- Recess and outdoor breaks
 - Students do not need to stay within their cohort during recess and outdoor breaks, but distancing is encouraged.
- Inclement weather days
 - School boards are required to develop plans which may include pivoting to remote learning.

PROTECTIVE STRATEGIES

- Cleaning and disinfection standards and protocols
 - School boards should review their cleaning protocols and reinforce them if needed to meet current public health requirements
- Shared materials
 - The use of shared materials is permitted
- Shared spaces
 - When different cohorts interact in shared **indoor** spacing, masking and as much distancing is possible should be maintained
- Cafeteria use and lunch protocol
 - Students may eat together outdoors without distancing,
 - Indoors with a minimum distance of 2 metres between cohorts

VENTILATION

School boards are expected to continue optimizing air quality in classrooms and learning environments through improving ventilation and/or filtration.

School boards are expected to:

- Have all ventilation systems inspected and in good working order prior to the start of the school year
- Use the highest-grade filters possible, preferably MERV 13 filters
- Undertake frequent filter changes
- Operate the ventilation systems 2 hrs or more before and after school occupancy
- Calibrate HVAC systems for maximum air flow and increased fresh air intake.

MENTAL HEALTH AND STUDENT SUPPORTS

Student mental health and well-being should be considered a top priority, as good mental health is fundamental to a student's ability to learn and to succeed at school and in life.

School boards should implement a tiered approach to mental health, which includes remote delivery of mental health services if needed.

School boards should collaborate with child and youth mental health agencies to support strong connections for students requiring more intensive supports. This will ensure the best use of mental health resources and supports is made across the broader provincial system of care.

School boards should focus on understanding the needs of students and collaborating with community partners to deliver culturally relevant supports for students.