



Wednesday, August 5th, 2020

Dear Students, Parents and Guardians:

As we continue to draw closer to schools reopening on September 8th, we continue to keep all students, families and staff in our daily prayers that you are healthy and safe.

This letter is to provide you with a summary of the key provincial directions included in last week's release of the [Guide to Reopening Ontario's Schools](#), and an update on *Niagara Catholic's Reopening Plan* for classes to begin on September 8th, 2020.

Highlights of the Provincial *Guide to Reopening Ontario's Schools* include:

- Parents/guardians have the option to have their child(ren) attend in-person for September, or to participate remotely through synchronous and asynchronous learning each day. Boards will decide on the re-entry admission dates if a parent/guardian delays the in-person attendance of their child(ren). Boards may also create waiting-lists for students who do not register prior to a date determined by the board.
- Elementary students will return to school five days a week, remaining in a single class (cohort) for the full instructional day to achieve the 304 minutes of learning. The full elementary curriculum will be delivered. Recesses and lunches may be staggered. There will be no EQAO Grades 3 and 6 assessments in the 2020-2021 school year.
- Secondary students will return to either a conventional model or an adapted model as designated by the Province. Niagara Catholic is one of 24 boards required by the Province to follow the adaptive model of learning, with limits of 15 students per class who will attend on alternate days. Graduating students will also need to complete the 40-hour community involvement graduation requirement and may do so virtually.
- Supports for students returning should include assessments to identify strengths and gaps in learning at key instructional times, to ensure that students have achieved fundamental building blocks in advance of learning new content.
- Health and safety training will be a key priority for all permanent and casual staff during Professional Activity Days prior to the beginning of school in September.
- Screening protocols will be established with messaging that students and staff are not to attend school or work if they display any symptoms.
- Non-medical or cloth masks will be required indoors for students Grades 4 to 12, and encouraged for students in Kindergarten to Grade 3. Reasonable exceptions on the requirement to wear masks will apply.
- Child-care centres will reopen at full capacity on September 1st.
- Schools should not plan field trips and activities requiring group transportation until public health data suggests otherwise.
- Schools may offer clubs and organized sports only if physical distancing is possible, and equipment and spaces are cleaned and disinfected between each use.

Highlights of the Provincial *Guide to Reopening Ontario's Schools* continued:

- School assemblies or other large gatherings should be avoided.
- Of the \$309 million funding for the reopening plan, the Province has indicated additional funds will be allocated for up to 500 public health nurses, personal protective equipment, additional teaching positions, additional custodians and enhanced cleaning supplies for schools and buses, additional supports for students with special needs, additional health and safety training, increased funding for mental health supports and funding for testing.

Boards have been informed that additional guidelines and protocols will be provided over the next weeks from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and local public health officials to guide reopening plans.

Niagara Catholic Reopening Plan

In early spring, a Niagara Catholic Reopening Task Force, comprised of students, staff, parents and other stakeholders was established. The experience, knowledge and recommendations of the Task Force led to the creation of an adaptable reopening plan for Niagara Catholic schools in the fall. The Plan was structured based on the core principles of health, safety and well-being of all students and staff, and that programs, supports and services can be delivered safely and in compliance with directives from the Ministry of Education to all Niagara Catholic students.

Input from students, parents, staff and the community through the June Thoughtexchange process; parent comments from the July Reopening Schools Feedback, and continued dialogue with Niagara Region Public Health experts provided valuable contributions to the creation of the draft Plan. On July 14th, the Board of Trustees endorsed the [*Niagara Catholic Reopening Plan*](#) which will remain as a working document to ensure that it continues to adapt and respond to the impact of the virus in our communities. On July 27th, *Niagara Catholic's Reopening Plan* was reviewed by a team from the Ministry of Education as part of their provincial assessment of board reopening plans.

The *Niagara Catholic Reopening Plan* provides a combination of adaptive strategies, operational expectations, links to protocols to limit potential risk to all students and staff, and procedures to provide Catholic education for all students. With the July 30th release of the provincial plan, we are currently reviewing our *Niagara Catholic Reopening Plan* to determine any necessary adjustments. During the week of August 10th, all students, parents/guardians and staff will receive a link to access the Plan for your information and review.

As part of the *Niagara Catholic Reopening Plan*, the following have already been actioned:

- ✓ Purchase orders have been submitted to companies for the delivery and installation of physical distancing markers, additional hand sanitizers, personal protective equipment, reception desk shields and internal and external health and safety signage.
- ✓ During the week of August 10th, all families will be contacted through School Messenger to complete an electronic re-registration form. The responses will inform principals of parental decisions for their children to attend school in-person or remotely. Important information on the process and re-entry dates will be provided, including a decision submission date of August 21st.
- ✓ Niagara Catholic is one of the 24 school boards in Ontario designated to follow an adapted secondary school model. With this direction, all Niagara Catholic secondary schools will implement a cohorted block scheduling of classes for secondary students, which will be a combination of in-person and independent asynchronous learning for one course for approximately 22 days at a time. Period One courses will begin on September 8th with students

divided into two cohorts - Cohort A and Cohort B and follow a schedule of either AAABB or AABBB alternating between weeks. Cohort A will attend every Monday and Tuesday and every other Wednesday. Cohort B will attend every Thursday and Friday and every other Wednesday. Beginning the week of August 24th, secondary principals and Student Support Services staff will contact students regarding schedules and options for students within the adapted model.

- ✓ On August 28th, all principals will forward school-specific information on the reopening process to families. When school resumes, all students will receive health, safety and well-being supports and expectations.
- ✓ Niagara Student Transportation Services (NSTS) has consulted local bus providers regarding the health and safety precautions that will be in place this school year. With the release of the Provincial Plan, NSTS is adapting its modeling to provide daily bus transportation to eligible elementary students, and to follow the adapted schedule for the secondary cohorts. NSTS has been involved in the design of the re-registration software, which includes asking eligible families if they will require bus transportation in accordance with the Board's Student Transportation Policy. The parent portal on the [NSTS website](#) will be open to families on August 17th with the transportation arrangements for eligible students. Once re-registration is complete by August 21st, NSTS will remove transportation arrangements from families who express an intention not to use the bus. The updated arrangements for families who expressed intention to use the bus will be available by September 2nd.

We recognize that there are many questions that families have regarding school reopening. We are working on a [Niagara Catholic Reopening of Schools Frequently Asked Questions - FAQ](#) section which is located on the Back-to-School panel on the Board website. This section will be updated frequently. Questions may be submitted to back2school@ncdsb.com Please check this page regularly for information. We will also advise families of any major updates through School Messenger, our website and social media platforms.

With the details of the return to school plan announced by the Province, there continues to be much work ahead for our staff as we move forward with our plan for a safe return to school and worksites.

Communication with our students, parents, guardians and staff is a significant part of our reopening plan. This letter provides the most current information as of August 5th. We will continue to adapt and respond to new information as it becomes available, and changing situations as necessary. Please be assured that the health, safety and well-being of our students and staff remains our top priority.

On behalf of Bishop Bergie, Chair Fera, the Board of Trustees and all staff, stay healthy, safe and well and continue to enjoy the summer.

Sincerely,



John Crocco
Director of Education