

Upper Grand District School Board meets to discuss September return to school

Written By PAULA BROWN

School will be back in session full-time for elementary and high schools students in Dufferin County come September, and a report from the Upper Grand District School on Tuesday (Aug. 4) gives a glimpse of what the year will look like for both.

Premier Doug Ford and Minister of Education Stephen Lecce released a return to school plan last Thursday (July 30) for the two million students from approximately 4,800 schools that have been out of classrooms since March.

"We were the first province to make the difficult, but necessary, decision to close schools back in March," said Ford in the briefing on Thursday. "This decision put strain on families, but now looking back I know we made the right decision."

The plan released by the Ontario government will see elementary schools, kindergarten to Grade 8, reopen across the province and returning to the normal five days a week, five hours a day schedule. Secondary schools in "non-designated" areas will return to school on a full schedule and attendance, while schools in "designated" areas will reopen with an adapted model; alternating attendance on different days and cohort classes of 15 students.

Upper Grand District School Board schools fall under the non-designated area and will return to school full-time while the Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board will have an adapted part-time attendance and cohorts of 15. students.

"The health and safety of students, educators, and their families is a priority, but there's no questions that children and teens benefit tremendously from social interactions with their peers, and direct in-person contact with their teachers," said Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones in a new release on Tuesday. "I'm proud of our government for developing a balanced plan backed by medical advice that will allow our kids to return to school safely."

Non-medical masks are mandatory for students from Grade 4 to Grade 12. Students from Kindergarten to Grade 3 are encouraged to wear masks, but are not required.

Parents can elect to keep their children home, with the option of online learning.

The Upper Grand District School Board, held a special meeting, five weeks before the beginning of the school year, to outline the plan the will be implemented in September.

A forty page presentation from the Board outlined the different models that will be used for the school age groups. The presentation included what school days would look like, safety measures that will be uses, and how transportation with pick up/drop off and school buses will be handled.

Elementary Schools

The UGDSB plan for elementary students falls in line with the government plans. Students will attend school every day for five hours, with possible staggered lunches and recesses, and will not rotate between classes. A student's class is considered their cohort.

Elementary students that opt to do online learning will be assigned to "central" classrooms, which can be composed of students from other schools. These classes will be taught by teachers not able to work at the schools and who are assigned to the remote learning.

Secondary Schools

For public secondary school students returning to in-class learning, the Board has provided two models "quadrimesters" or

?octomesters?. In the quadmester model, the semester will be divided into two terms, where students will take two courses for a term that will span for 10 weeks. In the octomester the four courses normally taken by students will be put into four terms, so a course spans five weeks.

The Board, in the presentation, provided two models that are being looked at to use for students that opt to do online learning. One plan is to have students remain a part of their ?cohort? or class, connecting during the school day with their teacher. The other option for online students being looked at is to have the courses taught online by teachers who are not able to return to schools.

Safety Measures

The Board in their presentation highlighted a number of safety measures that will be implemented for students returning to school, such as cleaning of high touch points, the use of fountains for water bottles only, and daily removal of garbage. Parents will need to assess for symptoms daily before school and staff will also be required to do daily self-assessments for signs of the virus.

Transportation safety measures for buses was also brought up in the meeting, with the Board introducing protocols such as masks for students and drivers, and regular cleaning of the buses.

With the beginning of the school year five weeks away, the Board also provided next steps in preparation.

A pre-registration survey for parents is being provided by UGDSB that will indicate whether a student will return to school, or enrol in online learning. The board will also be releasing a staff and parent guide.

Parents are being asked to pre-register their children for the 2020/21 school year.