

All students will be required to wear masks at school following UGDSB board decision

Written By PAULA BROWN

All students in the Upper Grand District Board returning to in-class learning in September will be required to wear face masks.

Trustees voted to pass a motion making face masks mandatory for all students, now including those from junior kindergarten to Grade 3, staff and visitors in a board meeting on Tuesday (Aug. 18).

"The motions that came forward last night came from trustees in response to concern regarding the health and safety of student and staff," said Martha MacNeil Chair of the UGDSB board of trustees. "It has the support of Wellington Dufferin Guelph Public Health."

"We are striving to keep our staff and students safe, that's what we voted on and has always been our primary focus," said Barbara Lustgarten Evoy, Vice Chair of the UGDSB board trustees.

There will be medical exemptions for children with conditions that prevent them from wearing masks. The school board has been asked to look for alternatives, such as face shields, for the children unable to wear mask.

According to the school board there will be "progressive disciplinary action" for students that don't comply with the mandate.

The Province previously made face masks mandatory for students from Grade 4 to Grade 12. UGDSB students will be returning to classes full-time, with regular sizes.

The Upper Grand District School Board had also made it mandatory for masks to be worn on buses by all students, staff, and visitors.

"This was not a last minute decision to have the meeting," said Lustgarten Evoy.

With two weeks before the return to school MacNeil says that 90 percent of the respondents of the parent survey, that was due last week, indicated they would be sending their children back to school. With the new changes to the model, that survey has been sent back out to parents.

"The survey has now been reopened in light of the recent changes regarding the secondary model and masking," said MacNeil.

The UGDSB released a notice on Wednesday (Aug. 19) with new details on the school boards reopening strategy. Addressing the reduction of class sizes the UGDSB says one strategy would include dividing Kindergarten classes into two groups, another is hiring additional teachers for junior and intermediate classes.

For high school students the school board says that due to operating at almost full capacity they are focused on reducing the number of in-person hours, allowing for smaller cohorts and physical distancing. The UGDSB says they are looking to hire approximately 100 additional teachers.

On Monday (Aug. 17) Waterloo Region District School Board trustees also voted unanimously to make face masks mandatory for all students.

The first day of school is scheduled for Sept. 8.