

Rural students facing internet problems with virtual learning

Written By Paula Brown

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB) students will soon be returning to classroom based learning following their second round of virtual, remote classes. While the change to virtual learning for some students living within town hasn't been a large issue, those who live in rural areas are facing problems due to poor internet connection.

Shelley Madensky, a resident of Mulmur, has three daughters who are currently working on classes virtually and says that no matter what they each do with their 'not great' internet connection, they're consistently bumping each other out of work.

'We're finding that they'll get their day started and everything is fine, but as they start doing more throughout the day on the internet, back and forth and sometimes on the phone for Google answers, they're just kicking each other off,' said Madensky.

Madensky's daughter Saige, who is in Grade 11, says she's had the Wi-Fi cut out while she's doing school work, which results in her being signed out, it then becomes a struggle to get back online.

To alleviate some of their problems, Madensky has switched her youngest daughter Jaycee, who is in Grade 7, to worksheets to allow for her two daughters in high school to be on the internet.

'I find for the high school kids it's more important to have the internet, they need to be on it more,' said Madensky. 'Her teacher prepares all the sheet for me and every Thursday I go and pick up all her worksheets.'

Heather Loney, Communication and Community Engagement Officer for UGDSB, told the Free Press in an email that the Upper Grand was aware of areas within the board that have poor internet connectivity, some more than others, including areas in Dufferin County.

'Even in areas with good internet coverage, some families are struggling with the challenge of multiple people learning or working at home, drawing on the same resources (bandwidth, devices etc.),' said Loney.

Similar to their response last spring the UGDSB has provided students and families with Chromebooks and other devices, internet support, as well as printed packages and asynchronous learning options.

'Families with internet capacity issues have an option to increase their data plan or use their phone as hotspots and the board provided funding to offset the costs ' families can contact their school principal for more information.'

While students will be returning to in-class learning by Monday (Jan. 25) Madensky reflecting back on their experience with remote learning by saying they're 'making it through.'

Online learning for all schools in Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph has been extended until at least February 1st.