

Upper Grand District School Board returning to four-course semester

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The Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB) is planning to return to a four-course per day semester model for high schools students come the winter semester.

The plan to return to the regular semester model was announced during a board meeting on Tuesday (Dec. 14), following authorization from Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG) Public Health and feedback from students, parents, and stakeholders.

"Many of you will know that following the Minister's announcement of Nov. 19 some boards immediately moved to return to the four-period semester model," said Pat Hamilton, superintendent of education for secondary schools. "We were not in a position to do so, however we also believed it important to not simply assume how our stakeholders felt."

The UGDSB provided a survey to all secondary students given on Nov. 30 and Dec. 1 for input on the return.

According to the report presented on Tuesday, a total of approximately 5,100 students participated (49 per cent of the student population) of which around 60 per cent indicated support of continuing a quadmester model, while slightly less than 40 per cent support a regular semester model.

Hamilton's presentation noted the difficulties with the quadmester model including organizing extra-circulars, field trips, and timing for both part-time and full-time staff.

"Our teachers did an incredible, exceptional job in shifting to quadmasters for the past year and a half, however the general consensus is that quadmasters pose significant challenges in terms of the delivery of curriculum to students, and they believe strongly that the return to a semester model is in the best interest of students," said Hamilton.

School boards across Ontario have been utilizing models such as the quadmester since September of 2020 in order to limit contact during the COVID-19 pandemic and support contact tracing of cases. The Ministry of Education announced in November that Ontario high schools would be able to shift back to a normal schedule as of February.

The UGDSB announcement regarding the high schools schedule comes at a time when COVID-19 cases are on the rise. As of Dec. 15 Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health has reported 233 active cases in the region. The UGDSB has a reported 35 cases of COVID-19 across 20 schools resulting in 24 class closure and one school closed (remote learning).

Despite the rise in COVID-19 cases the presentation said WDG Public Health has indicated no concerns at this time with the move to a semester approach.