



November 19th, 2020

Dear Waterloo Catholic Community –

We certainly hope that you are doing well in every way. We have almost made it to the end of November and while the community is definitely continuing to battle our COVID reality, our schools remain safe and learning is flourishing. When we began this school year, we could scarcely know what it would hold but I am so pleased to report that our schools are places where staff and students are thriving. Learning is unfolding and connections are being further forged. St Isidore is also a place where our virtual learners are able to continue their education. All of these points are worthy of celebration and I hope you will join me in thanking our staff for all they are doing to make these accomplishments a reality.

We are seeing some COVID cases in our schools but they are a reflection of our broader community and we have seen very strong evidence that all our protocols are working. We urge you to remain vigilant in reminding students about the importance of our protocols and to ensure you and all your family are adhering to Waterloo Region Public Health advice and that you are also completing the self screening every day before sending your children to school.

At the beginning of the month we invited you to participate in our ThoughtExchange about the experience of school re-opening. We had a variety of stakeholders who in total provided 2,776 thoughts and 67,900 ratings. There were 2,388 participants who shared 1,175 thoughts. It was exceptionally gratifying to see that the number one theme identified by elementary parents was “great job”. The next most common theme for all parents was connected to mental health and wellbeing. The most common themes across all groups had to do with 1) Health and Safety, 2) Learning Design and 3) Connections, Culture and Socialization. We are using all of our stakeholder results to help us in our action plan forward.

Building on our ThoughtExchange results, we know that Mental Health and Well Being remains a significant topic for all, and so let us take this opportunity to remind you that our mental health leads have designed a flyer to equip parents to have conversations with their kids/ teens about mental health, and how they can access support. This was provided to principals and shared with all families via School Messenger. I would also draw your attention to our WCDSB website where we have a number of resources. You may find this video helpful in finding those resources: [Parent Video](#)

I wanted to take this opportunity to speak to you about two other important topics: Inclement weather days when buses are cancelled and the Christmas Break. As you know – there are sometimes days in the winter when we have to cancel bussing due to the weather and unsafe driving conditions for our buses. In the past, if roads were still passable, we would leave schools open. On those days however, we often pooled classes based on the number of staff who fully attended and the number of students. This year that is not possible due to our covid cohort- related restrictions. In consultation with the public board, with whom we share bussing, when we cancel buses, we will close schools and have a remote learning day. Your teacher will communicate with you in advance so you know where to look for school work for the day and protocols on such days, but in broad terms, the teachers will post work in the morning, no later than 10 a.m. and students will work on their own timing in their home. It will allow all students to access some learning and we will be continuing to keep one and all safe. We realize it may not be a perfect solution and learning day, but bus snow days rarely were.



There has been a great deal of discussion about the Christmas Break. I wanted to share that the Minister of Education, Stephen Lecce, has indicated that there will be no adjustment to the school year calendar extending the break or adding remote learning days. Therefore, school will resume on January 4th. It will be critical to the health of our broader community, and certainly to the health of our schools, that all families observe Public Health guidelines during the Christmas season. It will certainly be challenging not to observe some of our usual traditions but we do have to remember that we are “*In this together*” and what one of us does, affects all of us.

Once again, I want to share that it is perhaps inevitable that when the provincial and regional numbers rise, we too will see some cases. I realize that if you get a letter saying there has been a case of COVID in your school that it is most unsettling. If we ask a cohort to quarantine it is to ensure that they remain safe and that the rest of our school community remains safe. Our safety protocols are working. I know how much we all value reading that statement so I cannot state strongly enough the importance of following our WCDSB operational guidelines, of wearing masks as warranted, good hygiene practices and most of all, strong daily implementation of the [COVID-19 school and child care screening tool](#) and a reminder that no staff should come to school without completing the adult self-assessment: <https://covid19checkup.ca/> The process of self screening each day is a vital step in ensuring the continued safety of all our schools, so sincere thanks to all for remaining faithful to this and to all our required protocols.

We have transitioned to Year 2 of our Pastoral Plan – *Gathered to Become*. On Monday our staff will have their Spiritual Development Day centered on this theme. Follow us on Twitter to see our [@wcdsbnewswire](#) Butterfly – our symbol for Year 2 of our Pastoral Plan - and its journey through our system. It feels so important to continue to find ways to foster community. Let’s look forward to the Advent Season and the transformation that happens when we let Jesus into our lives.

We sincerely thank you for journeying with us. Please reach out to us if you need help or guidance, and remain confident that we are here to support you, as we walk together as a hope-filled community. *#WCDSBTogether #WeGotThis*

Sincerely,



Loretta Notten
Director of Education