

DDSB Return to School FAQ – As of August 6, 2020

Learning Models

Q. With the Government of Ontario’s recent return to school announcement, how will schools at the elementary and secondary levels operate?

A. Elementary students will attend school five days per week, with students grouped together in a cohort for the full day, including recess and lunch. Students will still receive 300 minutes of face-to-face educator instruction. Enhanced health and safety protocols will be in place (i.e. enhanced cleaning, handwashing breaks, students eating lunch in their classroom, etc.) and the full range of the elementary curriculum will be provided. The school day will be very similar to what families and students are used to, with the exception of potential changes around bell times and staggered times for entry, exit and recess. While class sizes will remain the same, we will make every effort within available resources to ease any potential pressures on class sizes in order to create physical distancing of students where possible. Students in grades JK to 3 will be encouraged to wear masks and students in grades 4 to 8 will be required to wear a mask.

Specific details about bell times will be provided once we have more information on the logistics of busing students.

Secondary schools in Durham will open with a hybrid model that combines in-person and remote learning. Students will be placed in cohorts of approximately 15 students, will attend every other day and on alternate Fridays. This will be delivered in a “quadmester” format which involves a four-semester school year with each quadmester. This limits the number of contacts students have in a day and provides the opportunity to earn two credits at a time. Each quadmester is approximately 45 days of instruction (9.5 weeks). Students will be required to wear masks while in school and the same enhanced health and safety protocols will be implemented. Each day, students will have the opportunity to attend a Study Hall staffed by a teacher to provide additional assistance with independent work. The DDSB will be reviewing programming for students with a high level of special education needs who may require daily attendance and instruction at the secondary level.

Specific details about bell times will be provided once student bus transportation routing is complete.

Q. Do my children have to attend school in the fall, or can they continue learning from home?

A. Parents/guardians will have the option to opt children out of in-person learning and to have them learn remotely from home. Families received a message on Friday July 31 with a student-specific link to indicate if their children will return to in-person learning at a physical school site or if they will be opting out of in-person learning. An update was sent on Thursday August 6 giving families the ability to modify their selection. The deadline to complete the survey will be Wednesday August 12.

With the need to establish a Virtual School to effectively deliver remote learning across the district for thousands of students, families may not be able to immediately transfer between remote and in-person learning as changes in enrollment will impact staffing and class sizes. As a result, moving between remote and in-person learning may take place at the end of an instructional period (i.e. each term at the elementary level and each quadmester at the secondary level). Individual requests to move between remote and in-person learning will be examined on a case-by-case basis pending class size availability.

Students engaging in remote learning may not be able to participate with students and teachers from their own school.

Q. Will students who are assigned to virtual classrooms still be connected to their own school community for non-academic related communications?

We will explore what is possible. However, regular communications will come from the principal and teachers of the virtual school.

Q. I made a mistake on the survey sent regarding in class instruction for my child(ren), how can I adjust it?

A. Families will be receiving a separate e-mail on August 6th with additional instructions if you wish to change your selection.

Q. Will secondary schools be doing Distance Learning on alternating days via Google Classrooms or some other programs?

A. Yes students will be equipped to do Distance Learning on the days that they are not participating in online learning in class.

Q. If we choose to send our child(ren) to school but change our minds before the school year starts can they do online learning?

A. With the need to establish a Virtual School to effectively deliver remote learning across the district for thousands of students, families may not be able to immediately transfer between remote and in-person learning as changes in enrollment will impact staffing and class sizes. As a result, moving between remote and in-person learning may take place at the end of an instructional period (i.e. each term at the elementary level and each quadmester at the secondary level). Individual requests to move between remote and in-person learning will be examined on a case-by-case basis pending class size availability.

Q. If I decide that I need to remove my child temporarily for safety concerns, or they exhibit any symptoms and shouldn't be sent back until all symptoms are gone, what happens?

A. We recognize that this situation is going to be a new normal for an extended period of time and that it is likely that attendance may not be as regular for a variety of factors. Our focus for child(ren) who are learning in-person and may not be able to attend is that we will provide them work as we do now when children are ill. In cases where an entire class is required to

isolate at home, we would then pivot to online learning for the entire class for the required amount of time.

Q. My child attends a school with a modified program. What will their schedule look like?

A. Elementary (C.E. Broughton PS, Winchester PS): School principals have contacted families of child(ren) enrolled in an elementary modified calendar with respect to the remote learning program that will be taking place from August 4th to September 8th. Please contact your school's principal for more information about the modified program in relation to the remote learning program and the upcoming school year.

Secondary (Brock HS, Henry Street HS, Maxwell Heights SS): The first week of school for students enrolled in a modified calendar at the secondary level will start on August 31st. School principals will be connecting with those families in August on the type of instruction that will take place during the first week of school.

Q. Is French Immersion and Gifted education going to be available online and in person?

A. We anticipate being able to continue with French Immersion and Gifted programming in both remote and in-person learning options.

Enhanced Health and Safety Procedures

Q. How will students and staff maintain clean hands throughout the school day?

- Hand hygiene supplies will be available and easily accessible in schools and hand sanitizer will be placed at the entrance to each school
- Soap and paper towels will be provided in every classroom with a handwashing sink. Classrooms without a handwashing sink will be provided with alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- A schedule to regularly clean hands will be incorporated into daily routines (e.g. upon entering the school, before lunch and recess breaks, after using bathroom, returning from playing outside and after sneezing/coughing)

Students will be educated on proper cough and sneeze etiquette and to avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth.

Q. Will children be able to go home for lunch? If not, how will they eat and be safe since the obviously will be taking off masks?

A. Yes, children with the permission of their parents/guardians can always go home for lunch.

Q. What measures are being put in place to support safety in common areas?

A. The DDSB has developed strategies that support general safety in common areas. Here are several examples:

- Directional arrows, posters, and other signage will be present throughout the schools to provide guidance for appropriate distances in a variety of situations such as hallway lineups
- Entry into the school will be staggered to avoid congestion in hallways and corridors
- Pick-up and drop-off of students will happen outside the school, unless other arrangements have been made based on need
- School parking lots and “Kiss and Rides” will be closed off with pylons to all non-bus traffic during the arrival and departure of buses
- Weather permitting, schools will use outdoor space whenever possible for various activities such as breaks and regular classroom activities

Assemblies and other large gatherings will be postponed for the foreseeable future, until further notification.

Q. What will the DDSB do where the classrooms cannot accommodate the social distancing recommendations from the Ministry?

After we know how many students are enrolled at the school for in-person learning, we will develop timetables for students. At that time, we will assess how many classrooms we have where space is limited and if class-sizes are large. We will then prioritize the largest classes in the system and where possible create new classes (similar to what we would do in the September re-organization). Students from Grades 4-8 are required to wear a mask unless there is an underlying medical need. Students in other grades will be encouraged to wear a mask. All classes will spend time learning safety routines that include safe mask-wearing.

For more information please review our Return to School Guide on the DDSB Return to School Webpage.

Q. Has the school board considered smaller class sizes even though it’s not a requirement of the government’s return to school plan?

A. Yes, once we know how many students are returning to school for in-person learning, we will then track classes that are larger and attempt to address those that are of the greatest concern. As per direction from the Ministry of Education, secondary school students will be in a maximum of 15 students per cohort. The DDSB will make efforts within available funding to reduce class sizes as much as possible for elementary school students.

Q. What is the DDSB doing to clean schools?

A. Enhanced cleaning and disinfection practices by DDSB custodial staff have been established, reviewed, and approved by the Durham Region Health Department. Here’s some of what we’re doing:

- Frequently touched surfaces will be cleaned and disinfected at least twice a day throughout the school building
- Schools will undergo extra cleaning and disinfection at the end of each school day

- Soft surfaces that cannot be easily cleaned and disinfected have been removed from classrooms (e.g. plush/absorbent items, upholstered furnishings)

Q. What if I need to drop something off for my child during the school day or talk to my child's teacher? How do I do those things with the new safety provisions?

A. Visits to the school and child care centres will be by appointment only. Wherever possible, telephone meetings with parents/guardians will be held. If you need to get in touch with someone at the school, please call or email your child's school. Unscheduled visitors and family members of child(ren) may not be able to enter the location.

Q. Will staff, students, and visitors be screened before entering a school? How will that work?

A. Staff, students, and visitors must not come to school if they have symptoms/feel sick, or if they have come in close contact with someone with a suspected or positive case of COVID-19 in the past 14 days, including within their household.

Student Screening: Parents/caregivers will be provided with a checklist to perform daily screenings of their children before arriving at school and will be provided with information on the signs and symptoms of COVID-19.

Staff Screening: Staff will fill out a self-assessment tool to ensure awareness of possible symptoms of COVID-19.

Signs will be posted at entrances to the school to remind students, staff, parents/guardians, and essential visitors with information on health and safety policies. Teachers and other staff members will be provided with information on the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 in children so that appropriate action can be taken if children develop symptoms during the day.

Q. Will students be required to wear a mask in school?

A. Students in Grade 4 to 12 will be required to wear non-medical or cloth masks while in school. Students in Kindergarten to Grade 3 will be encouraged, but not required to wear masks.

Q. Will masks be provided to students?

A. Yes. Non-medical masks will be made available for students. We encourage students to bring reusable masks from home to wear at school.

Q. Will students participate in music, physical education classes and organized sports teams?

A. Subject teachers will work with departments to implement adjustments to meet health and safety requirements. Delivery of curriculum may look very different in some areas. More information will be forthcoming, but physical education and music will be part of the school experience.

Due to the health and safety restrictions at this time organized sports teams and sporting events are not permitted. Large gatherings and assemblies will not occur until provincial direction is given.

Q. Will my child be able to use their locker?

A. At this time, student lockers will not be available until further notice. Students are to keep their belongings with them at their desk and are encouraged to only bring the materials they will need for learning.

COVID-19 Symptoms and Contact Tracing

Q. How will schools conduct contact tracing?

A. Daily records of attendance of all persons within the school building will be kept up to date and available to Durham Region Health Department to facilitate contact tracing in the event of a confirmed COVID-19 case or outbreak. To help facilitate contact tracing for COVID-19, students in classes will be grouped together to the greatest extent possible. This will involve students remaining in contact with only their classmates, teacher, and other educational support staff assigned to the classroom for as much as the school day as possible.

Q. What happens if a student gets sick during the school day?

A. A protocol has been established if students become ill during the school day. Here's how it will work:

- Students or staff who develop COVID-19 symptoms will immediately be separated from others
- Staff and parents will be directed to consult their health provider and should be provided with information about COVID-19 testing locations
- Staff and/or students who test positive may not return to school until they are cleared by the Durham Region Public Health Department
- Staff and/or students who test negative can return to school once they are symptom-free for 24 hours
- DDSB schools will immediately report any suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 to the Durham Region Health Department and the Board
- DDSB schools will participate in contact tracing through keeping records of classes, transported students, and visitors to schools

Q. What happens if there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 in a school?

A. If a COVID-19 positive case is identified in a school, the Durham Region Health Department will provide further instructions on who else in the school may need testing and/or monitoring/isolation. Staff/children who are being managed by the Durham Region Health Department (e.g. confirmed cases of COVID-19, household contacts of cases, etc.) must follow their instructions on when they can return to school.

Q. How many confirmed cases in the school before they close it down completely.

A. The Durham Region Health Department is finalizing their protocol based on direction from the Ministry of Health. Once it is finalized, we will be sharing with families.

Technology Needs

Q. My child will be learning remotely from home but does not have a device to do so, can a Chromebook be supplied for them?

A. Yes, the DDSB will be supporting students who may not have access to technology but require it for remote learning. A Chromebook can be provided upon request. Specific roll-out details will be communicated with families in the coming weeks.

Q. How can I receive updates and communications from DDSB about my child(ren)?

A. In order to receive direct updates about your child(ren)'s education, you must have a valid e-mail registered with us. We will need to verify your identity for legal/privacy reasons. As a result, this is usually processed at the school level. If you believe that you are already in our system, please e-mail parentportal@ddsb.ca with your request. A specific process must be followed for legal/privacy reasons and we may need to refer you back to your school who will be able to support this request in mid-to-late August.

Well-Being

Q. Where can I find information and help for mental health and well-being?

A. Starting a new school year can be challenging for many students, especially with so many changes happening in school and in the outside world. The DDSB's Inclusive Student Services team has also developed a set of resources on our website that you can visit at [Family and Community COVID-19 Supports](#).

Special Education

Q. How will the DDSB be accommodating students with special needs?

A. The Inclusive Student Services team is working to review all aspects of COVID-19 that may impact the safety of staff and students. This includes but is not limited to - medically fragile student programs, developmental classrooms and specialized equipment, additional PPE for staff that need to work in close proximity with students, and transportation considerations

Q. If I choose to opt-out for my special needs child, currently in a small class placement, will I lose that spot when I decide it is safe to return?

A. Students in special education programs for the 2020-2021 will receive educational programming affiliated with their program placement whether in school or through remote learning.

However, if a student registers with an alternative provider, for example a private school, that is a transfer in enrolment and the placement in the program would be offered to another family.

Child Care

Q. Will child care centres be open?

A. Child care centres are permitted to be open. Please check with your child care provider for more information about their re-opening details.

Q. Will considerations be made to group children who may require after school care, and or may require taking the bus home?

A. It may not be possible to group students in this way. However, schools will consider this information as cohorts are organized by schools before the start of the school year.

Transportation

Q. My child(ren) take the bus to school. How will busing work with the new enhanced safety protocols?

A. The DDSB is working with [Durham Student Transportation Services \(DSTS\)](#) to ensure the cleaning and disinfection of school buses meets expectations outlined by the Durham Region Health Department and Ministry of Health. There will be further funding to support student transportation and we will provide an update on measures that will be taken. You

An online student sign-up for transportation will be required this year and families must respond no later than Tuesday August 11. Families who qualify for transportation will be required to complete the online sign-up for each of their children. DSTS is reviewing all bus schedules to ease congestion during morning drop off at schools. **Bell times may be affected due to these changes.**

Please complete the online student sign-up and find out more at:

<https://www.dsts.on.ca/covid-19>

DDSB Offices and Community Use of Schools

Q. Are DDSB offices opening in September?

Yes, staff will return to their offices in August. We will follow the direction of the Government of Ontario as far as what that looks like and will appropriately accommodate staff with medical needs.

Q. Will the Board be meeting in September?

Yes, the Board will be meeting in September. However, we will offer a blended approach so that those wishing to attend the board meeting as observers will continue to watch online.

Q. Will I be able to book school space through a Community Use of Schools Permit?

A. Our priority is providing a safe learning environment for our students. For that reason, we will not be issuing any permits for community use of schools so that we can focus on deep cleaning schools daily.