



April 23rd, 2020

Dear Waterloo Catholic Community –

It has been a few weeks since we have connected, so we thought it important to offer you a few important updates as we continue to navigate this time of school closure and distance learning. Let us begin by saying that we truly hope that you and your families are well and that you are finding ways to stay healthy and positive. As an Easter people we pray that the hope of the season is alive in your homes. But these are unsettling times for everyone and we believe it is absolutely OK to feel that you are not OK. We know that each of us has a unique reality and that will position us differently in terms of our ability to walk through this time and to support our children's learning journey right now.

For the past three weeks we have begun the journey into Educator-led learning and it could not have been done without the tremendous efforts of so many. We are most appreciative to our staff who have worked so hard to put provisions in place so that we could reach all of our students. We hope that every student continues to have contact with their teacher(s) and that each one knows that we care for and value each of them. Your teachers are truly amazing and they are definitely here for you. We will reiterate that our most pressing concern remains student well being – both mentally and physically. As we have said before, it is not *"business as usual"*, but we do hope that students are connecting with their teachers as this is our *"new normal"* for the time being.

We wanted to provide you updates on a few different topics of interest to you and your children. Know that this is a rapidly changing landscape and with many uncertainties, and as there are many players to both consult and work with, as well as others who provide us vital direction or information, sometimes full clarity takes a little time.

As always, on our WCDSB board website you will find from our home page a link to [WCDSBLearn@Home](#) where a host of additional resources for all learners will be found. We also encourage you to continue to visit our [WCDSBPray@Home](#) webpage as well as our [FAQ](#) page. You can also follow the #STEAMDays hashtag where lots of fun and engaging activities are being posted. With that said, a few updates:

Length of the closure:

We are awaiting direction from the government and Ministry of Education on this point. We expect it will be forthcoming soon. While it is unlikely we will be returning to our buildings in the short term, full clarity about our return or what that might look like when we do return, may still be a while in coming.

Expectations During Distance Learning:

We realize there are different realities for all of our students and all of our educators. For that reason, each student and teacher is held to the guidelines the Ministry has provided for minimum hours. To review what we have shared previously – the suggested hours reflect both the time a teacher might use in providing formal instruction or guidance, as well as the time the student will spend completing the learning task or activity. There is not a firm expectation that all students have to be "online" at the exact same time, although in some cases that might happen on occasion.



Assessment and Evaluation:

Equity has been a significant consideration in this new landscape as not all children are equally positioned to succeed to the best of their ability when learning from home. We also know that students learning from home can place added pressure on a parent who may be juggling their own work or family related responsibilities. For these reasons, assessment in elementary is taking the form of feedback or formative assessment, rather than grading. Students can benefit and continue progressing through this feedback. For our students in secondary, they will receive both formative and summative assessments – that is feedback and grades, but teachers will be working to support a student’s best outcome and will not be penalized if the current circumstances detract from their ability to succeed. Marks will not drop below that attained on March 13th, when schools were declared closed. There is however every opportunity for a mark to improve, and for learning and achievement to be enhanced.

Report Cards:

There will be a report card in June for all students and they will contain grades. As noted above, those grades will be largely informed by the marks students had attained prior to March 13th, but there is every opportunity for those grades to improve based on any work submitted during this time of distance learning, if there is evidence of growth and/or improved performance. In the case of graduating students, midterm marks were sent to the Universities and Colleges to assist with post-secondary admission.

Graduation:

We know that graduation is a significant event in the life of a student and his/her family. For this reason, this has been a difficult decision. Our secondary schools have no option but to postpone graduation ceremonies as a result of venues not being available to us. As you can appreciate secondary graduations are often large events and so they are not easily accommodated in alternate settings. We have made the decision that all of our secondary schools will hold their graduations in the fall. This will in no way impact a student’s ability to actually graduate from high school should they have met the requirements. We are still in the process of finalizing our decision in relation to grade 8 graduations and will communicate that information as soon as a final decision has been achieved.

Thought Exchange – Your Voice

As most of you will be aware, we recently engaged our stakeholders in an exercise of asking them what questions or concerns they had after one-two weeks of distance learning. Our survey closed on Tuesday April 21st in the evening and we are now starting to unpack that feedback. We are thrilled that you took us up on this invitation. We had just under 2000 participants and approximately 37,000 ratings from all our stakeholders. We know that at a very high level elementary parents are expressing thoughts about the home learning environment and the types of tasks students are assigned, about feedback and assessment, and about equity. Secondary parents are sharing thoughts about the nature of student and educator contact, and also about feedback and assessment, as well as issues related to equity. There are roughly 14 sub-themes in the Thought Exchange feedback that we have identified and there is much more analysis we can do, and it will help to inform our thinking and actions moving forward. A high level report on parent feedback is available at these two links, but much more will be shared in the weeks to come, that will map to themes and the take-aways from the feedback.

[Parent/Guardian for an Elementary Student](#)

[Parent/Guardian for a Secondary Student](#)



Finally – we encourage you to closely follow any and all directives from our governments and Waterloo Region Public Health. As a local and global community – we have never been more connected by an event or issue and now is the time to do everything we can to ensure we can soon return to life as we knew it not so long ago. As an Easter people we believe in the power of the resurrection and the promise of new life. Certainly this signs of the season affirm that promise. 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*.

Sincerely,

Loretta Notten
Director of Education

Bill Conway
Chair of the Board

