



April 14, 2020

Dear Teachers and Designated Early Childhood Educators,

I hope you all had an opportunity to relax and unplug over the long weekend. While this break likely looked different than usual, hopefully you were able to connect with family, even remotely, and enjoy as much as possible under these unusual circumstances. Your self-care and well-being matters and is important.

As many of you have likely heard, Premier Doug Ford announced today that students will not be returning to school on May 4 as previously indicated. He stressed that this does not mean that the school year is cancelled and that the Minister of Education will provide more details in the upcoming days. With that said, I know many questions remain. Please share them with your Principal and we will work through them together. As soon as we know more and have details to share, we will do so. Your continued patience, flexibility and creativity are required more than ever in the days and weeks ahead.

I want to begin by thanking you for all of your efforts in making the first week of remote learning for all a reality for students and families. While this is new and uncharted territory for many, the overall feedback has been largely positive and we are finding our way together. With the [information and resources](#) provided, I hope that you have felt well supported as you establish a new normal for students in your virtual classrooms.

I want to state again that each of you know your students and their individual situations and needs best. I have trust in your professional judgement to determine how to provide what's necessary for learning to continue. We all share a common goal but you determine the platforms and tools that work for you to ensure that every student feels connected and has appropriate opportunities to learn. Continue to do your best and know that we appreciate your commitment and hard work.

We have received feedback from students, families and staff over the last two weeks and the suggestions given and concerns raised vary widely. With this said, we have established five principles to guide our work together as we move forward:

1. Prioritize the health and well-being of everyone.
2. Focus on the continuation of learning in a variety of ways.
3. Maintain relationships and connection to one another.
4. Engage all students, especially those who have historically been underserved and those who may not be able to participate effectively in remote learning for a variety of reasons. In other words, we want to remain in contact with students and their families, even if they are not able to submit work or participate in learning sessions.
5. Build staff capacity to be effective in this remote space.





As we move into the second week of remote learning, I have some important information to share with you on the following topics:

- Remote Learning Teacher and DECE Survey Results
- Online Learning Platforms and Web Conferencing
- Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting
- Online Safety – Students and Staff
- TDSB Policies and Procedures
- Device Distribution to Students
- Mental Health and Well-Being

Please note that we are also sharing similar information in a [letter to parents/guardians](#) today.

Remote Learning Teacher and DECE Survey Results

What we hear from staff is critical and I want to thank the thousands of teachers and designated early childhood educators who took part in the remote learning survey. Some of the key findings include:

- Educators were very clear that the current situation we find ourselves in is challenging at best. Educators shared that across the system there is a wide range with regard to comfort with technology and skills in online pedagogy.
- Almost all participants commented on the importance of staying connected with staff, students, and parents — that everyone needs to support one another — to preserve a semblance of normalcy and safeguard everyone’s mental health and well-being.
- Educators indicated overwhelming support for professional development on how to teach successfully in a virtual learning environment using one of the board supported tools – Brightspace and Google Suite for Education.
- When asked what virtual learning strategies educators needed support with, the top three strategies were: providing content and curricular resources to students, assessment and evaluation in a digital learning environment, and sharing activities and assignments with students.

This input helped guide us as we prepared educator resources for the first week and will continue to help us focus supports where you have told us they are needed most. We want to continue to hear your thoughts, questions, and concerns. Please tell us about your first week of remote learning through this [Thoughtexchange](#) online conversation.

Online Learning Platforms and Web Conferencing

Educators have a number of options for online learning platforms and web conferencing tools to connect with students remotely and we rely on the professional judgement of staff to determine which platform(s) to use and how best to engage students and families. As a result, we recognize that the remote learning strategy for each class may look different.

However, it is our expectation that teachers and designated early childhood educators in Kindergarten will have a method of regular engagement with all of their students to ensure





students are able to access learning tasks and resources, support the development and maintenance of students' well-being and provide students with feedback on their demonstration of learning

While educators may select the platform that works best for them and their students/families, the TDSB provides and supports two online learning platforms to students and staff — G Suite for Education (Google Classroom) and Brightspace. These two virtual classroom platforms will continue to be supported through tech support, privacy, protection, and professional learning/training. Please find additional information in the [Brightspace Privacy Centre](#) and the [G Suite for Education Privacy and Security Centre](#). Students and staff utilize their TDSB account to access these platforms 24/7 from any internet-connected device anywhere in the world. Both platforms have undergone TDSB security assessments and the district retains full ownership of any content placed in either system by staff or students. If you do not have experience in a different platform, please choose Brightspace or G Suite for Education.

The Brightspace Learning Platform consists of a rich online classroom where teachers can share information through announcements and calendars, post content and assignments, provide feedback, a digital portfolio for students to document their learning and platform for parents to have a window into the student online classroom - Brightspace for Parents. G Suite for Education consists of a series of tools to facilitate communication, creation and collaboration. The tools include classroom, drive, docs, forms, calendar, Gmail and sites. Many of the G Suite tools also come in both iOS & Android App versions in addition to web access. Google Classroom is a tool being used extensively during remote learning. New online training sessions have been added for the week of April 14. Please register on [Key to Learn Remote Learning](#).

With regard to video conferencing specifically — educators are welcome to use video conferencing but are not required to do so. This message will also be shared with parents and families, as we understand that there have been some questions and clarification needed related to the expectations around video/web conferencing. We encourage those interested in trying video conferencing to reach out to peers who have been using it and/or to participate in a training session.

It is also important that during this time of remote learning, teachers make use of the resources they have access to at home, rather than ordering consumable supplies. As per health and safety restrictions related to COVID-19, we ask that schools not distribute resources directly to students. There is a team working on creating packages of materials for students who do not have access to electronic materials. The Equity, Well-Being and School Improvement Working Group is also exploring options to meet the needs of students for whom online learning is not accessible.

Let's focus on creating accessible, relevant and respectful learning experiences for all students by addressing the different barriers to their learning that they are now facing. Every student who can participate online must be supported to maintain engagement in their online classroom community. Some students with special education needs and English Language Learners may need different strategies to participate fully in online learning. Collectively, as school teams (e.g.





classroom teachers, special education teachers, teacher librarians, educational assistants) you can reach every student and create collaborative solutions for removing challenges they are facing in a remote learning environment.

ESL/ELD staff continue to collaborate with other school staff to personalize learning and meet the unique needs of our English Language Learners. Resources can be found on the [ESL/ELD website](#) and staff can also access [over-the-phone interpretation](#) to assist with ongoing communication with parents/guardians.

Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting

I know that many of you still have questions related to assessment, evaluation and reporting. During this time of remote learning, it is important to stay connected to your students to support well-being and provide opportunities to check for understanding and provide meaningful feedback of their demonstration of learning. An Assessment Working Group will be sharing assessment resources for both elementary and secondary to support you in your work with your students later this week.

For **elementary students**, teachers will use a variety of approaches to gather evidence of student learning along the way and will provide meaningful feedback to students on their progress. Opportunities should be built in to check for understanding. Evidence collected that show significant improvement in learning, during the closure period, may be taken into consideration by the teacher when assigning a final grade in a subject area. Otherwise, students in Grades 1 to 8 will be assigned the grades earned based on their learning up until schools closed on March 13, 2020. All students, Kindergarten to Grade 8, will receive a June report card.

Mid-term marks will only be entered for **Grade 12 students** by April 27 to meet the deadline to report grades to the Ontario Universities' Application Centre ([OUAC](#)) and the Ontario College Application Service ([OCAS](#)). A memo with specific details and supports regarding assessment and mid-term marks for Grade 12 students will be shared tomorrow.

For **students in secondary school**, teachers will assign tasks, projects and culminating activities during remote learning and provide feedback; however, this work will only be taken into consideration for final marks if it improves the student's mark. If not, final marks submitted in June will reflect work completed by March 13, 2020.

With the above information in mind and in light of the challenging circumstances and the different learning environments for students at home, the goal is to support the overall achievement and well-being of students and marks should not go down during this period. As stated by the ministry, our shared goal is to ensure the successful completion of the school year for all students and to support students to advance to the next school year, earn credits, and to graduate.

Some families and educators may be concerned about the learning gaps that may form during this time of remote learning. We understand that when the school closure period ends, and into





next fall, we will need to be very intentional in understanding the learning needs of each student and providing appropriate interventions.

All students should be able to access learning online or through print resources. Some students may not be motivated to continue learning in light of how we are proceeding with marks over the next few months. However, it is important that, as educators, we work to encourage students to remain involved in their learning wherever possible because it will assist them when we all return to school. It is an opportunity to focus on learning rather than grades. With that said, we also understand that some students and their families may feel unable to participate in the continuation of learning from home. In these cases, we ask that you encourage students and families to remain connected however they can, even if unable to fully complete assignments and/or participate in all learning sessions.

Online Safety - Students

During this time of remote learning when many students will be spending an increased amount of time online, it is incredibly important that we continue to reinforce [online safety practices](#). While I know that this is a topic you have likely already discussed with students, now more than ever we need to reinforce the lessons and guidelines already provided. Ensuring online safety is a shared responsibility between families and educators and below you will find links to information to help support discussions with students and/or to share directly with families. Thank you for your commitment to helping ensure students conduct themselves appropriately and remain safe online.

- [TDSB Online Code of Conduct](#)
- [Canadian Centre for Child Protection](#)
- [Toronto Police Service – Internet Safety](#)

Online Safety – Staff

Online classrooms come with new considerations and learning for everyone. As such, it is important to consider best practices for how educators can maintain expectations of professionalism, safety, and support for themselves and students in a remote learning environment. Educators are spending much more time online and as you do, we are committed to support appropriate guidelines to ensure safety and security.

As always, if you have any concerns or questions, please speak with your Principal. This is a new environment and way of teaching for many and we are committed to supporting you and ensuring you have the information you need to move forward using this new platform and new online tools. In consultation with the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, the Ontario College of Teachers, and the Toronto Police Service, please review the TDSB [Online Safety web page](#) for guidelines and information to consider when teaching remotely in a virtual environment.

TDSB Policies and Procedures

It is important to remember that all TDSB policies and procedures are still applicable in an online setting. If and when staff become aware of incidents that could lead to a suspension or





expulsion, and/or involve discrimination, harassment or hate, they should not only respond to these incidents but must also report them to the school principal. School principals will then investigate the incident and determine if there has been an impact on the school's climate and follow appropriate policy and procedure.

- [TDSB Online Code of Conduct](#)
- [The Board Code of Conduct \(PR585\)](#)
- [Human Rights Policy \(PO31\)](#)
- [Workplace Harassment Prevention and Human Rights Procedure \(PR515\)](#)
- [Canadian Centre for Child Protection](#)
- [Toronto Police Service – Internet Safety](#)

Principals must document and report incidents of discrimination or hate involving or impacting students to their Superintendent and the Human Rights Office at humanrightsoffice@tdsb.on.ca using [Form 515B](#), consistent with [PR515](#) and the steps set out for addressing such incidents in [Expected Practices For Understanding, Addressing & Preventing Discrimination](#). It is also necessary to help ensure that appropriate supports are provided to impacted parties. Any hate activity must also be reported to the Toronto Police Service. As always, please connect with your Principal, Caring and Safe School Administrator or the Human Rights Office if you require support.

Device Distribution to Students

Last week I shared that we had started to execute our plan to loan devices to every student who requires one, to ensure continuity of learning. To date, approximately 29,000 families require devices. While the delivery of devices began on Monday, April 6, this significant task will take time. As a result, staff are working day and night to prepare and distribute these devices in a timely and efficient matter. We made the decision to have the devices delivered directly to the homes of our students to ensure that families can remain safely at home. This option will take more time, but the safety of our communities is our top priority.

Upon delivery, all families are provided with information that outlines the terms of use for the device, set up instructions, login instructions, how to access help, etc. Our hope is that students will be supported and have access to the help they need to get online and begin learning as quickly as possible once the device is delivered.

While mechanisms have been set up to support families with technical issues, please be aware that students and families may come to teachers to report problems with the device. In this case, please feel free to put them in direct contact with the help desk or call the help desk yourself with any questions related to the device and/or students' abilities to engage in a remote learning environment.

We have also been working to ensure students with special education needs have access to Special Education Amount (SEA) equipment to support remote learning. Families and schools





are working in collaboration with the Special Education SEA team, the OT/PT team and the IT team to ensure either Chromebooks or specific and specialized equipment are delivered to students.

Mental Health and Well-Being

We understand that this is a challenging time for many individuals and families and that isolation can impact mental health and well-being. Just as a reminder, please access the valuable information and resources available for staff on our [Mental Health and Well-being](#) web page. It's important that we work together to stay safe, both physically and mentally.

Closing Thoughts

I would like to reiterate how much I appreciate the efforts of all educators — each and every one of you — in getting remote learning up and running for our students and families this week. Thank you for your ongoing commitment and understanding as we work through this together. There will be bumps and adjustments along the way, but we are in this together with a shared goal of supporting all students.

Please know that what is most important right now is everyone's health and well-being. We care about our students and we also care about you. In these uncertain and stressful times, do what you need to do to take care of yourself and your family and stay well.

My commitment to you is that we will continue to connect and keep in touch on a regular basis to share information and keep the lines of communication open. If you have questions or need help of any kind, please feel free to reach out and let your Principal and/or Superintendent know what you need. We are in this together and we need to lean on one another for support now more than ever.

Sincerely,

John

