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Details of school re-openings ?anxiously awaited,? says YCDSB

Schools have been closed since March and looking ahead to an uncertain fall start, school boards across Ontario were tasked with planning for three possible models for September.

The first was a full-time return to in-person learning, with appropriate measures outlined by Boards of Public Health, the second an ?adaptive model? combining in-person and distanced learning, and the third, ?distance learning? for all with schools remaining closed.

On Thursday, the Province announced plans to move forward with the first model for elementary schools and the second for most Ontario secondary schools. Now, York Region's two school boards are left to flesh out the fine details.

?The Minister of Education announced that elementary schools in Ontario will re-open in September following the full-time return to in-person learning model,? said Ab Falcone, Director of Education for the York Catholic District School Board, on Friday. ?Included in the Education Minister's announcement were a number of directions and requirements that school boards need to incorporate as they finalize their school reopening plans. We are also working closely with our partners at York Region Public Health to ensure that all necessary precautions and protocols are in place.

?Rest assured that the team at the York Catholic District School Board is working diligently to finalize our plans so that we can share the details with our school communities. We know everyone is anxiously waiting to learn what to expect in September and [we] will share full details very soon.?

While further details are still outstanding, the YCDSB confirmed that students in Grades 4 ? 12 will be required to wear non-medical or cloth masks while in schools, with exceptions for those with medical conditions, that students in Kindergarten through Grade 3 will be ?encouraged but not required? to wear masks in common areas. Students with ?a high level of special education needs will be able to partake in daily attendance and instruction? and that child care centres will open at full capacity starting September 1.

On the part of the York Region District School Board (YRDSB), their re-opening plan will be guided by 10 key principles: ?Prioritizing student and staff safety?, ?Well-Being? of students families and staff, ?Continued Commitment to Equity? looking at ?the needs and interests of students and families who are marginalized or vulnerable as we plan and deliver learning in this new context, ?Flexibility and Adaptability?, ?Continued Professional Learning? for teachers to adapt to the new normal, ?Trust Teachers? in their judgements regarding students' needs, prior learning, strengths, etc., ?Communication?, ?Collaboration?, ?Fiscal Responsibility, and ?High Expectations.?

?Our Board has been working on developing plans to support the safe reopening of schools for our students and staff members,? said the YRDSB in a statement. ?We appreciate that these are uncertain times and you will have questions and concerns about the process for reopening. We will continue to prioritize health and safety and take measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 through the reopening of schools.?

Families, they said, will receive a pre-registration form this week asking their ?intentions? for students to participate ?in person? or through remote learning.

?For those eligible for transportation, the form will also include the ability to opt-out of this service. Where possible, parents are asked to arrange their own transportation to and from school for their children.?

By Brock Weir