

School board working to get learn-from-home technology into students' hands

The York Region District School Board held its first electronic public board meeting last Tuesday. Members of the public were able to join in the webinar along with the chair and trustees.

YRDSB chair Juanita Nathan acknowledged that we are in unprecedented times due to the COVID-19 situation.

"This isn't our usual way of doing business but we are all learning together," she pointed out.

The focus of the meeting, as expected, was e-learning as well as tracking student progress. Trustees posed questions on how online learning and assessments will work, especially for graduating students.

As part of learning from home, most students and staff will engage in learning that is not required in real time.

"This means they will engage in activities at different times of the day and evening to best suit their individual needs. Teachers will develop learning opportunities (e.g., tasks, assignments or projects) for students that may involve engagement both online and offline. Teachers will plan opportunities to assess student learning and provide feedback to students throughout the remainder of the school year. At this time, there is no requirement for teacher-led instruction with groups of students or classes online at the same time. Throughout all planning and programming processes, teachers consider the strengths and needs of students with Individual Education Plans," said Ms. Nathan.

It was also acknowledged that not all students have the technology they need to access online learning resources.

"We are working to get equipment into the hands of our students and their families in a safe and efficient manner. Secondary students will begin to access YRDSB technology this week, with elementary students receiving technology starting next week," said Ms. Nathan, adding that they are filling requests for 18,000 devices for students and internet access to 1,200 students for the purposes of teacher-led online learning.

In keeping with the new learning methods, Grade 1 to 8 students will receive a final report card at the end of this school year while kindergarten students will receive the Communication of Learning. Assessment information gathered prior to March 13 will be used to inform the information in these documents. Elementary students will continue to be assessed throughout the remainder of the school year to support their ongoing learning. For secondary students, who will also receive a final report card at the end of the 2019-20 school year, teachers will continue to assign learning tasks, projects and culminating activities that will be assessed to

inform students about progress and marked for the purposes of evaluation.

“This year, midterm marks are only required for graduating students. Teachers will use their professional judgement and interpretation of evidence of student learning when determining a midterm mark for potential graduates. Under the current circumstances, teachers are asked to use the full body of assessment evidence available to them based on work assigned up until March 13 to determine a midterm mark that reflects a student's learning and achievement to date,” said Ms. Nathan.

An email detailing these announcements went out to all the YRDSB families the next morning. The email recognized that these are exceptional circumstances and learning from home can be very different for our students and families.

“We know parents and caregivers may be essential workers or working from home and not available to provide support for students. These are not normal times and as educators, we understand the challenges ahead. Our goal is to create online learning environments that are safe, equitable and inclusive, and support every learner, without penalty for circumstances beyond the control of our students. We will do our very best to support our students during this unprecedented time, and believe our students will rise to the occasion, presenting their best efforts,” stated the email signed by director of education Louise Sirisko.

The YRDSB has developed some tips for families available on the Board website at www.yrdsb.ca/covid19.

Parents will also find additional information about community supports, learning and well-being resources and a list of frequently asked questions. The website includes a built-in translation tool that can translate content into over 100 languages.

By Kinjal Dagli Shah