

Trustee Rachel Chernos Lin

Ward 11 • Don Valley West
Toronto District School Board
416-395-6787 • Rachel.ChernosLin@tdsb.on.ca

Dear parents, caregivers and community members,

Yesterday evening, staff provided trustees with a thorough update on the progress and challenges in setting up the virtual schools, and outlined reorganizational changes that will be coming to our many of our elementary bricks & mortar schools so that we have enough teachers in each system to cover both more effectively.

Over the past couple of weeks, our bricks and mortar schools have stabilized, and though we have had cases of COVID-19, our safety protocols and risk mitigation measures appear to be working. Our students and staff who are back in our buildings are now used to the new protocols and though it is far from normal, there is laughter, fun, and lots of learning.

Our virtual schools have had a bumpy start. The good news is that most Ward 11 students now have a teacher, though for a small number of our extended French and French immersion virtual students, this is, temporarily, an English-speaking teacher. There also remain, as of yesterday, at least 4 classes in the LC1 school who still do not even have a temporary teacher. At the same time, we now have the numbers in for elementary families who are requesting changes from in school to virtual, and vice-versa. With a differential of approximately 4,500 students moving into virtual, we need to pull teachers from our bricks and mortar schools into our virtual schools, so that we have the right number of teachers in each of these systems to meet the needs of our students in both systems.

Below you will find further information about this process, as well as other updates including details regarding an emergency motion I am putting forward tonight at Board, calling on the Province to enact the 28 Day Pause recommended by Toronto Public Health and the Toronto Board of Health that would see the closure of indoor dining, indoor bars, and indoor social venues. These measures are crucial if we are to stop the rapid increase in COVID-19 cases in Toronto and will help to preserve the successful re-opening of our schools.

As always, I encourage everyone to keep checking the [TDSB's website](#) and social media ([Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#)) regularly as more information is released and updated. In the meantime, please read on below for updates about the following items:

- [Class Reorganizations](#)
- [Emergency Motion: 28 Day Pause](#)
- [Outdoor Education](#)
- [New Health Screening Guidelines](#)
- [Lockdown & Fire Drills](#)
- [Saturday International Languages Credit Program \(High School\)](#)
- [International Languages – Elementary and African Heritage](#)
- [Director of Education search](#)
- [Parent Engagement](#); School Councils & Parent Conferences
- [October: Islamic Heritage Month & Somali Heritage Month](#)

Class Reorganizations

Each year, school boards, including the TDSB, undergo a reorganization of classes in the opening weeks of school to balance classes and staffing based on the actual number of students that are in a class versus the projected number of students.

While this is typically a routine process, this year will be significantly different as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This school year began with class size averages — based on registration numbers — that were slightly below our targeted class size caps.

School	J/K	Grades 1 to 3	Grades 4 to 8
Virtual School	29	20	35
TDSB identified High Priority Schools (based on TPH and other criteria)	13	20	20
All Other Schools	24	20	27

This was achieved, in part, by allocating additional staff to schools in hopes of bringing the majority of classes in-line with the targets. At the time, teachers were not removed from schools with small class sizes to avoid further disruption and allow for a safer, smoother re-opening.

Our plan was to let enrolments stabilize and then have a complete system reorganization in late September/early October. While these decisions brought stability and helped address issues with higher class sizes, "bricks and mortar" schools are now "overstaffed".

First formal weekly enrolment reporting was September 25, and indicated class size averages for in-person learning as significantly below actual average class sizes.

School	J/K	Grades 1 to 3	Grades 4 to 8
Virtual School	27.77	19.08	31.41
TDSB identified High Priority Schools (based on TPH and other criteria)	10.91	14.99	13.81
All Other Schools	17.55	16.33	20.39

Please note these averages and graphics do not include Special Education classes.

The current percentage of elementary students in Virtual School is 35% compared to the 30% on which staffing allocations were based. By October 13, 2020, the percentage of elementary students in Virtual School will be 37.3%.

So far, to keep Virtual School classes at the desired targets, we have depended heavily on occasional teachers, so as to not disrupt staffing in the "bricks and mortar" schools. The reorganization process returns staffing levels that match the number of students we have and receive Provincial funding for.

School	J/K	Grades 1 to 3	Grades 4 to 8
Virtual School	28.71	19.93	34.56
TDSB identified High Priority Schools (based on TPH and other criteria)	11.19	17.52	18.01
All Other Schools	18.77	17.68	21.54

In this next phase, permanent staff who are not required in the brick & mortar schools, based on the number of students in the school, will have to be redeployed to where they are needed (virtual school and possibly to other schools).

Please note:

- There will be adjustments to class sizes, in many cases an increase. However, they will remain within our targeted class caps so that health and safety standards relating to classroom size and social distancing can be maintained.
- We will continue with our commitment to provide lower class sizes in schools serving communities identified by Toronto Public Health as higher risk for contracting COVID-19.
- As has been the case already this year, this will also result in a greater number of combined grade classes ('splits').
- In the Virtual School, students currently without a teacher will be prioritized.

Timelines

On/by September 30, students/families had the opportunity to make their decisions whether they will be continuing in or changing the location where their child(ren) is/are learning (ie in-school vs virtual). Over the past weekend, TDSB staff reviewed the allocation data – in school enrollment as of October 2 and students changing in between virtual school and in-school learning. Next steps:

October 6

- consultation with School staffing committee/School Council
- new staffing models submitted to Superintendent
- determination and declaration of surplus staff
- Superintendent provides approval for any changes to staffing models

October 7-8

- teachers are informed of any assignment changes including redeployment to Virtual School

Friday, October 9

- realignment date (students/staff are moved and set up in student administration system Trillium for start on October 13)
- parents of students of in-person schools should be notified by their school of any changes

Tuesday, October 13 and Wednesday, October 14

- In-person school: students and staff begin learning and teaching in new classes
- Virtual School: students new to Virtual School and students with a new teacher in Virtual School will work asynchronously until teacher connects

Thursday, October 15

- all students in both in-person school and Virtual School learning in class with their teacher

Health and Safety Strategies

Staff have been working closely with Toronto Public Health on all health and safety strategies including through the establishment of new "cohorts":

- Original class lists will be maintained for contact tracing both before and after October 13, including seating plans.
- Cleaning of classrooms between change in cohorts.
- Appropriate PPE available for all students and staff as needed.
- HEPA filters will be added in classroom without mechanical ventilation.

In-Person Elementary School

In-Person Secondary School

Emergency Motion:

All of us committed to the re-opening of schools this fall were puzzled by the Province's decision to re-open indoor dining and bars a month before schools opened their doors. Now we find ourselves in early October extremely concerned about rising case counts of COVID-19 in Toronto. On Friday, Oct. 2, 2020, Toronto Public Health asked the Province to enact a 28 Day Pause on various places where the city has experienced outbreaks, including indoor bars, restaurants and social venues in Toronto. The Province, so far, has refused to do so.

Tonight I am bringing forward a motion asking the our Board to write to the Chief Medical Officer of Ontario, Dr. David Williams, to ask him to enact the 28 Day Pause called for by Toronto Public Health and the Toronto Board of Health, in an effort to stop the spread of COVID-19, to keep our students and staff (and their families) safe, and to prioritize the re-opening of our schools. I am hopeful this will pass unanimously. To read this motion, please click [here](#).

Outdoor Education

The TDSB strongly supports outdoor learning spaces and many of our schools have developed outdoor classroom areas, which typically consist of a dedicated area where ad hoc seating is used. Our schools have, to varying degrees, made use of outside spaces for learning.

These outside spaces are of course very different between schools across the city, with some more adaptable or accessible than others to outside learning and in all cases, weather permitting. In most cases, our outdoor spaces do not have coverings as they are not intended for full-day learning. In order to address concerns, we have taken steps to negotiate greater access to city parks, marked physically distant circles at some elementary schools and provide opportunities for classes to spend time outside in their cohorts.

Several people have suggested a more comprehensive use of exterior classrooms, sometimes envisioned as exterior structures with roof coverings or fully tented enclosures to protect students from the elements. Staff are currently evaluating the feasibility of outdoor classroom settings, but issues have been raised of liability, safety, equity and practicality/resource allocation.

Liability

Most of our sites are unattended overnight and over the weekend. Erecting a tented enclosure creates liability concerns related to both the erection of the structure and its ability to withstand wind and severe weather such as snow storms. In addition, there is liability related to the unauthorized use in evenings and on weekends, as well as the potential for attracting unwanted individuals and removing them at the start of the school day. TDSB has already had examples of this at several schools without these structures.

Safety

Staff and student safety are also a concern. While these structures may be suitable during warmer periods, use during winter months would require some type of heat source to make the space comfortable for learning and to ensure that adequate provisions are taken for staff as required under the Health and Safety Act. Tented structures with walls are considered by Toronto Public Health to be the same as an indoor space, and as such would be subject to the same guidelines re masks, distancing etc.

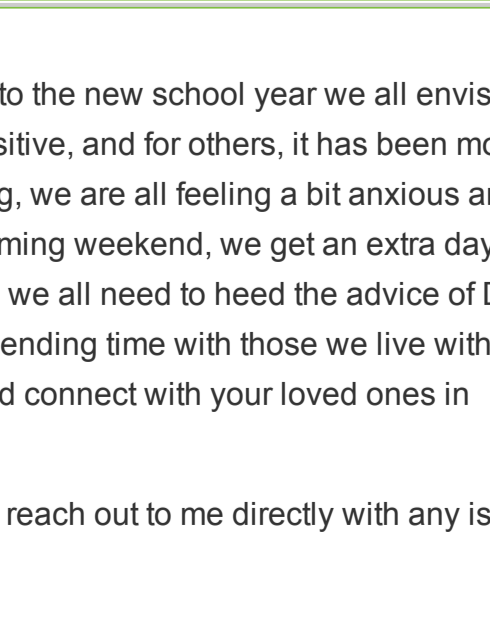
Practicality and Use of Limited Resources

In terms of utilization of staff resources, there is concern that staff would be expected to erect and take down tented structures daily, or moving furniture into and out of the structure on a daily basis. Daily cleaning of the area would require extra time from other caretakers which they don't have. We don't believe that this is a practical approach as we don't have sufficient staff to undertake this work. Our caretaking staff are already conducting additional enhanced cleaning in all schools, and this would add to an already overstretched caretaking workforce. Our primary concern has been the health and safety of students and staff inside school buildings and this is where we have directed our resources in terms of cleaning and other health and safety measures.

Equity

Equity also plays a role in our decision. While some schools can fundraise and have parent volunteers to do much of what is proposed, many of our more challenged locations would not. This would create situations whereby some schools would be able to support these type of programs, while others could not. Based on the above, staff are concerned that tented structures are not a viable solution to accommodate greater outdoor learning spaces. That being said, staff have agreed to consult with other Boards, like the Toronto Catholic District School Board, to determine how they have started their tent pilot project and the extent to which they have managed and/or overcome the considerations noted above, and report back to trustees next week on what they learn and what we could conceivably implement.

Keeping each other safe with a new screening tool for students, parents and school staff



Ontario.ca/SchoolScreening



New Health Screening Guidelines

The Ministry of Education announced last week that it has updated its [COVID-19 school and child care screening guidance](#). The TDSB takes its lead from Toronto Public Health, which has also revised their guidance based on the provincial direction.

According to the revised guidelines, students and children with symptoms such as fever and cough will still be advised to stay home until they are able to consult with a health care provider and receive an alternate diagnosis or a negative COVID-19 test. A second set of questions now deals with symptoms that are commonly associated with other illnesses, such as runny nose or headache, and provides the following direction:

- Students and children with only one of these symptoms will be advised to stay home for 24 hours, after which they can return to school or child care if their symptoms are improving.
- Students and children with two or more of these symptoms will be advised to stay home until they are able to consult with a health care provider and receive an alternative diagnosis or a negative COVID-19 test.

In addition, based on the latest public health guidance, the symptom list for children in school and child care no longer includes abdominal pain or conjunctivitis (pink eye).

Based on this update, here is the new [student screening tool](#) from Toronto Public Health, as well as the revised [TDSB's Health Pass](#). The TDSB Daily Health Screening App has also been updated to reflect these changes.

Lockdown and Fire Drills

At the beginning of each school year, our students and staff prepare for the year ahead by establishing the foundations for a successful year. One of the ways we know we can help students be successful is to create a safe environment. Though no one ever wants to see an emergency happen at a school, it's important for school staff to be equipped to deal with those situations, should these occur.

The TDSB has taken steps to ensure your child's safety while in school. Each school has developed emergency preparedness plans that include steps staff will take in the event of an emergency, how staff will get students away from possible dangers, and how students' families will be contacted.

One aspect of emergency preparedness is the lockdown and fire drill. All schools are required to conduct a minimum of two lockdown drills and six fire drills each school year. The drills last approximately 5 minutes and ensure plans are effective and can also systematically identify any safety concerns. This year, as all cohorts need to participate, additional drills may be required.

Communication is also critical in any emergency situation. Please ensure the school office has accurate emergency contact information and advise us of any changes during the school year.

Saturday International Languages Credit Program (High School)

[19 international language credit courses](#) are available to current high school students. All courses are subject to sufficient enrolment. [Online registration](#) closes on October 9. Classes begin on Saturday, October 17.

International Languages – Elementary and African Heritage

This free program welcomes JK to Grade 8 students to learn a language (except for English and French) for 2.5 hours a week. [Learn more and register online today](#). Classes began on Saturday, October 3, but in many cases you can still join.

Director of Education Search

Trustees at the TDSB are searching for a permanent Director of Education. As a member of the search committee, I am one of eleven trustees working with executive-search firm Mandrake to bring the best candidate forward this fall. Our Board is excited to involve the public in learning about the process.

This afternoon, the Board is scheduled to approve the Director Search Criteria, after which the job will be posted tomorrow. With candidate interviews and assessment scheduled for November, we will hopefully have a new permanent Director in place before the end of the year.

To learn more about the Director Search process, including an informational Webinar and Presentation, please check out our microsite [here](#).

PARENT ENGAGEMENT: School Councils & Conferences

This year, parent engagement is going to look a bit different, with meetings, at least for the foreseeable future, taking place virtually. As such School Council Operations were updated last week in a message from TDSB Associate Director, Karen Falconer, to School Councils and Administrators (copied: [here](#)).

Among the updates:

- Parents/Caregivers with children in the Virtual School will be allowed to fully participate in School Councils of their 'in-person' school
- School Council meetings are to be held virtually due to protocols on numbers allowed to meet in person
- School Council elections, where possible, will be held by the week of *November 1 (new!)* - more details forthcoming this week
- School Councils have received Zoom Accounts for meetings, and will get access to SchoolMessenger for sending messages to the school community.

Please reserve the following dates for exciting Parent Engagement Events.

- October 24 & 25: Parents as Partners: www.parentsaspartners.ca.
- November 21 & 22: [PIAC](#) School Council Information & Appreciation.

Heritage and History Month

While we normally celebrate the opening of these events in person, this year, virtual is the way to go! This month, we celebrate Islamic Heritage Month and Somali Heritage month. To learn more, click on the following links:

- [Islamic Heritage Month](#)
- [Somali Heritage Month](#)

Finally, I know this has not been the start to the new school year we all envisaged. For many of us, it has been extremely positive, and for others, it has been more challenging. And with COVID cases rising, we are all feeling a bit anxious and wondering what winter will bring. This coming weekend, we get an extra day of rest over the Thanksgiving holiday. While we all need to heed the advice of Dr. Theresa Tam and be safe, ideally only spending time with those we live with, I hope you all find time to relax, unwind and connect with your loved ones in whatever way you can.

And, as always, please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly with any issues, concerns or comments.

Warm regards,

Rachel

Rachel Chernos Lin

TDSB Trustee, Ward 11, Don Valley West, Rachel.ChernosLin@tdsb.on.ca

