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Dear friends,

Thank you to the 150+ parents, caregivers, community members and staff who tuned into our virtual Ward 11 event on Monday evening. Dr. Vinita Dubey, Associate Medical Officer of Toronto Public Health, gave an impressive and detailed presentation on Covid 19 and our schools, and fielded dozens and dozens of questions. It was a highly-informative 1.5 hour session, so if you missed it, want to watch it again, or share it with others, we have made the Zoom recording - including the chat & transcription - available. You can find it on [my Ward 11 web page](#), or click [here](#).



I'd like to take this opportunity to update everyone about a couple of important senior leadership staff changes. The first one pertains to our ward, where John Chasty, superintendent of a number of Ward 11 schools, is retiring this month (these schools include the following in Ward 11: Northern, Blythwood, Sunnyview, Bedford Park, Park Lane, Owen, St. Andrews, Harrison, Windfields, Dunlace, Denlow, and Rippletown). John was a consummate professional, brought a wealth of experience to this role, and did a terrific job supporting students and principals. If any of you attended my ward forums and coffee mornings, you likely got a sense of John's depth of knowledge and perspective on how best to support students. I will really miss John, wish him all the best, and thank him so very much for his service supporting all of our Ward 11 schools.

Luckily, this story has a silver lining! I am pleased to announce that Ron Felsen will be replacing John Chasty to support these Ward 11 schools. As Ron is a former principal of Northern Secondary School, he may be familiar to many in our ward. Most recently, Ron has been centrally-appointed, working on the Optional Attendance Review and the Secondary School Review, and then overseeing the creation and running of the Virtual Secondary School this school year. With all of this experience, and, in particular, his depth of knowledge regarding the schools in our learning network, Ward 11 schools are sure to be in good hands with Ron joining the team on January 4th. Welcome Ron!

The second change pertains to the most senior position at TDSB -- that of Director. As discussed in previous newsletters, trustees are currently undergoing a search for a New Director of Education. Given the pandemic, and the recent movement of Toronto to the grey zone, this search has been more challenging than anticipated. As a result, we have paused the search, and will resume in the new year. In the meantime, however, our current Interim Director, Dr. Kathy Witherow, is set to retire at the end of this month. Last night, the Board of Trustees confirmed the promotion of Associate Director, Karen Falconer, to the position of Interim Director, to take effect as soon as Dr. Witherow retires. We are disappointed to not have a permanent director in place at this point, but feel confident Karen is imminently capable and ready for the task ahead of her and I am really looking forward to working with her. To read more about Karen and this exciting new development, please click [here](#).

As we get ready to move into the winter break, there is still a lot of new information coming out of the TDSB. So, grab a cup of coffee or tea, a comfy spot to settle in, and read on!

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Prepare for Remote Learning - just in case!

Make sure to read Wednesday's message from Director Witherow:

Dear Parents/Guardians,

As we all prepare for a much needed winter break, the TDSB is planning ahead for the New Year and what learning may look like as we return to school in January. As cases of COVID-19 continue to rise in Toronto, so too does the possibility of individual classes, schools or the system moving to remote learning for a period of time. As a result, we want to be as prepared as possible. It is important to note that any decision on the closure of a school or the system is made based on the advice of public health officials or the provincial government and is not made by the TDSB.

We have received no indication that schools will close, however, we do want to make sure we are prepared to implement any decision smoothly and efficiently and continue to support our students' learning and well-being.

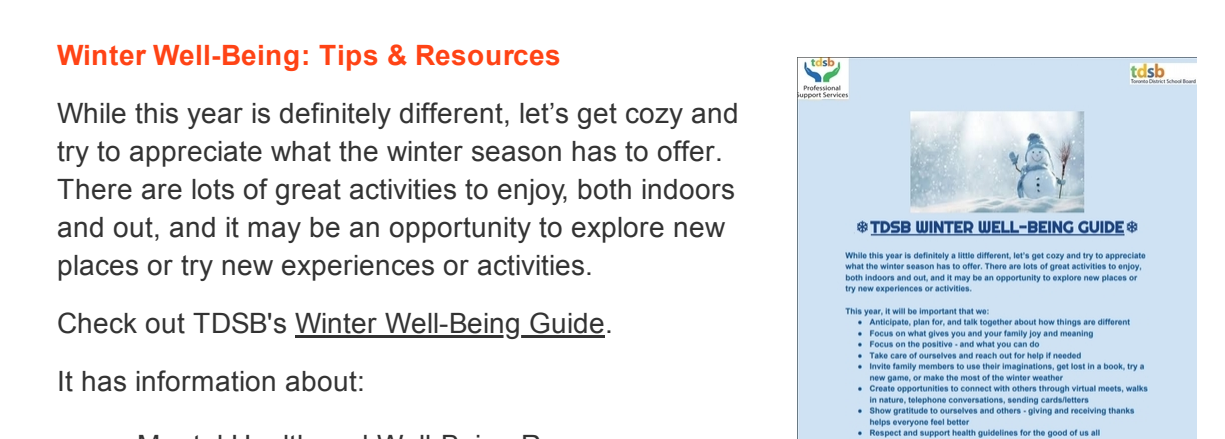
So to ensure your family is prepared for any shift to remote learning — whether at the class, school or system level — please consider the following actions:

- **Ensure you have a working device at home.**
- **Ensure that the school has your correct email address.**
- **Login to teacher's online platform to confirm you have access. Your child should have done this with their learning.**
- **Bookmark the [Student Virtual Learning IT Support page](#).**

Also, as we get ready to leave for a couple of restful weeks, please ensure personal belongings, such as shoes, clothing, and anything else your child may need over the break is brought home, as well as any food that may be left in their locker or cubby.

Thank you for your continued support. We wish your family a safe and healthy holiday. We look forward to seeing everyone in 2021.

Dr. Kathy Witherow
Interim Director of Education



Survey: Elementary students switching between in-person or Virtual School learning

The next opportunity to request a switch between in-person learning and virtual learning for elementary students was originally scheduled for the end of January (to take effect February 16). At this time, we are requesting that parents/guardians complete a switching survey to indicate if your child is interested in switching at the next opportunity. *Please note that this survey does not guarantee that a switch will be possible.* The information gathered will help inform our decision-making for this last opportunity to switch for the 2020-2021 school year.

If you received a link to the switching survey from your child's school, you do not need to complete it again. Please respond no later than 4 p.m. on Monday, January 4, 2021.

For more information read the [message from Director Witherow](#).

To fill out the Survey surf to the [Switching section on the TDSB website](#)

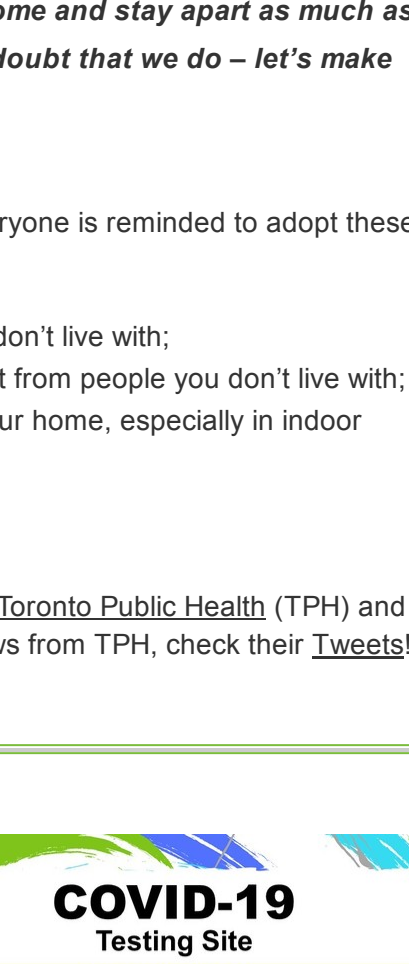
Winter Well-Being: Tips & Resources

While this year is definitely different, let's get cozy and try to appreciate what the winter season has to offer. There are lots of great activities to enjoy, both indoors and out, and it may be an opportunity to explore new places or try new experiences or activities.

Check out TDSB's [Winter Well-Being Guide](#).

It has information about:

- Mental Health and Well-Being Resources
- Winter Programming/Activities in the City or Families
- Health and Physical Education Resources
- Stay at Home Activities
- Resources For Youth
- Resources For Students with Special Needs
- Tip Sheet For Families Celebrating A Holiday



2-1-1 Toronto: A one-stop help line for community, health and government services

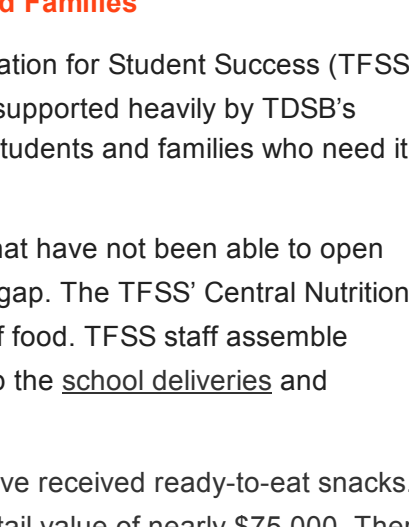
The pandemic has made life more challenging for many families. 211 is a telephone helpline (call 2-1-1) and website that provides information on and referrals to Ontario's community, social, health-related and government services. Operators at 211 can help you understand what services and government benefits exist and explain how to apply.

211 is answered 24 hours a day, every day of the year across Ontario. The services provides information about more than 60,000 community and government programs and services.

211 also provide an interpreter in over 150 languages. When 211 answers the phone, ask for the language you want and hold the line. You can connect to 211's website [here](#).

Reduce the Virus Spread!

The best way to keep our kids in school right now is to ensure everyone is following public health guidelines to prevent community spread. This is the most critical thing we can do. Let's all do what we can.



"Please choose to keep at least six feet or two metres apart from people you don't live with. Please choose to wear your mask when you're exposed to people you don't live with. Please choose to wash your hands as frequently as possible. And please choose to stay home and stay apart as much as you can. So if we've got to do this – and there is no doubt that we do – let's make it work."

Dr Eileen de Villa

As COVID-19 continues to circulate in the community everyone is reminded to adopt these steps for self-protection:

- as much as possible limit contact with anyone you don't live with;
- as often as possible, keep at least two metres apart from people you don't live with;
- as often as possible, wear a mask when outside your home, especially in indoor settings and when physical distancing is difficult;
- wash your hands frequently; and
- remain at home when ill.

For more information, check out the [Covid-19 page from Toronto Public Health \(TPH\)](#) and the [TPH Lockdown Guide](#). To get the most up to date news from TPH, check their [Tweets!](#)

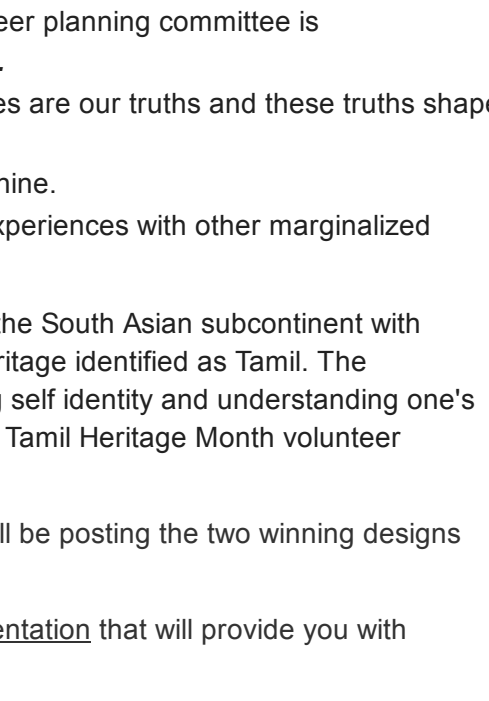
Covid-testing sites: Thorncliffe, Flemington (both extended through December!), and Sunnybrook

In and near Ward 11, there are several places to get a Covid-test, including

Sunnybrook Hospital (2075 Bayview Ave, U-Wing).
Open daily 9 am to 7:30pm

- Dec.24 & 31: 9am - 5:30pm
- Dec.25 & Jan.1: 12 - 4pm

Info (including pre-booking your appointment): [here](#).



The City of Toronto, in cooperation with [East Toronto Health Partners](#), has now opened a number of [additional test centres in East Toronto](#), including:

Thorncliffe: TNO Youth Centre (45 Overlea Blvd., Unit 108A)
Open every day for the month of December, except on Christmas Day (December 25) and Boxing Day (December 26).

- Dec. 12–24 and Dec. 27–31 from 1–7 p.m.
- Closed on Dec. 25 and 26

You may also book an appointment in advance at this site by calling 647-477-1640.

Thorncliffe: Jenner Jean-Marie Community Centre (48 Thorncliffe Drive)
Open December 14–18, 21–24 and 28–30
Hours: 1 to 7 p.m.

Flemington Park: Dennis R. Timbrell Resource Centre (29 St Dennis Dr.
Open December 18–20 and 27.
Hours: 1 to 7 p.m.

Flemington Park: Angela James Arena (165 Grenoble Dr.)
Open December 14–16, 21–23 and 28–30
Hours: 1 to 7 p.m.

In addition, various pharmacies also offer free testing, by appointment, only to people meeting certain criteria. More information: [here](#) (Pharmacy Locations & Details) and [here](#) (for the locations).

Central Nutrition Pantry Opens for TDSB Students and Families

To help support students and families, the Toronto Foundation for Student Success (TFSS) has launched the [Central Nutrition Pantry](#). This initiative, supported heavily by TDSB's Logistics Services, gets nutritious food into the hands of students and families who need it the most.

In the absence of numerous student nutrition programs that have not been able to open this year, the Central Nutrition Pantry is helping to fill this gap. The TFSS' Central Nutrition Pantry is fueled by donations as well as bulk purchases of food. TFSS staff assemble deliveries for schools and then Logistics Services picks up the [school deliveries](#) and ensures they get to students attending in-person classes.

In just one week, 12,995 students in nearly 30 schools have received ready-to-eat snacks. More than 32,500 food items were delivered for a total retail value of nearly \$75,000. There are still more than 70 schools on the waitlist, and the TDSB Logistics Services team will keep making deliveries in support of TFSS as long as food is available, to reach as many of them as possible.

Have your say on the Budget of TDSB and the Ontario Ministry of Education

The latest Budget news:

TDSB: In the past weeks, staff presented the [2021-22 Strategic Budget Drivers](#) and the [Ministry of Education Funding Guide](#) to Trustees, to the TDSB Community Advisory Committees, and to SEAC (the Special Education Advisory Committee) and PIAC (the Parent Involvement Advisory Committee). Feedback relating to the TDSB's budget strategic drivers will help guide decisions around the 2021-22 budget development process. Please kindly submit your feedback on these [proposed budget strategic drivers](#) through a [survey form](#) by **January 31, 2021**.

Ministry of Education: On December 3, 2020, the Ministry of Education also released the [2021-22 Education Funding Guide](#) to school boards. If you would like to provide feedback around the Education Funding Guide, please kindly submit them through [this survey link](#), by **January 8, 2021**. Staff can incorporate the feedback into the draft submission for review and approval at the Finance, Budget and Enrolment Committee meeting on January 20 2021, prior to the submitting the Board feedback to the Ministry. For much more information, read more [on the TDSB website](#).

Tamil Heritage Month at the TDSB

Tamil Heritage Month is recognized nationally since October 2016, provincially since March 2004 and by the Toronto District School Board since January 2016. The month of January was chosen as it coincides with one of the most important celebrations for Canadians of Tamil heritage, the Thai Pongal harvest festival. Millions of Tamil people around the world irrespective of their religion celebrate Thai Pongal and offer thanks for an abundant harvest.



This year, the chosen theme selected by the volunteer planning committee is **Ummi - (அம்மா) - (அம்மா) - (அம்மா) : Truth - Rights - Unity**. **Ummi (அம்மா)** recognizes that our lived experiences are our truths and these truths shape our understanding of the world around us. **Ummi (அம்மா)** examines our right to flourish and shine. **Ottumai (அம்மையே)** emphasizes our shared lived experiences with other marginalized communities and our shared humanity.

Toronto has the largest Tamil population outside of the South Asian subcontinent with thousands of TDSB students and staff members heritage identified as Tamil. The importance of building awareness, creating a strong self identity and understanding one's own roots and rights are important objectives of the Tamil Heritage Month volunteer planning committee.

A poster challenge is currently underway, and we will be posting the two winning designs that reflect this year's theme in early January.

We are proud to share with you a [power point presentation](#) that will provide you with information about the Tamil Heritage Month.

Worth Repeating...

(still-current links from last week's newsletter)

Programming:

- [Second one-time Funding for Parents in Ontario](#)
Please note: For now, please consider this taxable income; we've had a few inquiries since my last newsletter, and I am trying to get a clear answer from the province. Will update as this information becomes available.
- [Middle French Immersion \(grade 4 start\):](#) Info & Registration (Jan.4-29)
- [Optional Attendance](#) (with deadlines)
- [Transition to High School Parent Information Sessions](#) (recordings)
- [Post-Secondary Information Session](#) (recording)

Covid & Safety:

- [Updates to Student COVID-19 Screening Procedures](#)
- [Health & Safety Measures](#)
- [Active Covid-19 Advisories](#)
- [Covid: Stay Healthy during Flu Season](#)
- [Winter is Coming: Ventilation, Transportation, and Snow Days](#)
- [Traffic Safety Tips: Help Make this a Safe Winter Season](#)

Other:

- [2021 Prime Minister's Awards \(for Teachers, STEM & Early Childhood Educators\)](#) (deadline January 12, 2021)
- [Asian Heritage Month: Invitation for the planning committee](#)
- [Supporting United Way & Toronto Foundation for Student Success](#)

As always, I encourage everyone to keep checking the TDSB's website (tdsb.on.ca) and social media ([Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#)) regularly as more information is released and updated.



Finally, as we move into the winter break with Friday, December 18th being the last day of the school, I want to wish everyone a safe, healthy and happy holidays. However you celebrate the season, I hope you all find time for rest, relaxation and fun! And remember, school resumes on Monday, January 4th, 2021 (be it virtual, in school, or learning remotely!). Please do check your email periodically over the winter break -- it is possible there could be a communication or two over the break!

Warm regards,

Rachel

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