



Dear Parents,

I hope this note finds you all well and staying safe.

With several weeks of remote learning ahead of us (at minimum), staff at both the central and local level, along with trustees, are working hard to ensure students and families are supported and engaged in this new virtual environment. The challenges are many, as students have varied needs and situations, and different families have different expectations and environments. Our staff are continually trying to figure out the best ways to work within these parameters, while they too dealing with the impact of Covid-19 in their own homes.

As a trustee and parent of children in the TDSB, I have been following the transition to emergency remote learning closely. In recent weeks, I have had countless discussions with students, teachers, administrators, our senior team (superintendents, associate directors and director), and other trustees about their experiences. I have also heard from a lot of parents -- by phone, by email and on social media. These conversations have helped to inform my perspective and led me to bring forward two emergency motions last week at the Program and School Services Committee on May 6. **These motions passed unanimously at committee, and went on to be unanimously approved this past Tuesday evening, May 12, by the entire board of the TDSB.**

The first motion deals with the importance of providing interactive learning and focusses on the importance of connections between students and teachers during the Covid crisis. The motion asks Director John Malloy to use feedback from parents and students, such as that received in response to the "Thought Exchange" sent out by the TDSB recently, and to continue his work with employee groups to arrive at and implement best practices for "consistent, interactive, remote learning."

It is important to recognize that online learning can never re-create or replace the classroom experience and that it does raise issues around privacy concerns. But what I was hearing from parents was that while some classes were participating in Google "meets" and virtual teacher-led learning (either taped or live), many were not. Parents voiced concerns that their children missed seeing their friends and teachers, and were not feeling engaged in their classes in ways they saw or heard about happening in other classrooms. My aim with this motion was to try to find a way to help solve the lack of face to face interaction in a consistent way across our board. Our goal must be the same as it has always been -- to provide our students with a meaningful education, even under what are now less than ideal circumstances. It is important children not be left behind because the barriers seem insurmountable or too difficult to break down. We must all put our heads together to find practical and creative solutions and this motion provides that direction.

The second motion deals with the many educational challenges created by the Covid-19 pandemic, and requests the support of the Provincial Government in ensuring that teachers and students will receive the help they need throughout the 2020-2021 school year. The motion names specific areas where such help will be necessary, including, but not limited to:

- funding for any gaps created in literacy and numeracy;
- teacher training;
- support for children with special needs who may have been without respite care, physiotherapy and occupational therapy during this period;
- increased supports for special education;
- additional student success teachers to help students with the transition from elementary to high school ;
- funding technology to achieve a student/device ratio of 1:1 without requiring boards to reallocate funding to purchase such technology. ***This kind of support and investment is crucial if we are to expect teachers and students to be able to move to a remote environment confidently, quickly, nimbly and effectively.***

As with the first motion, this second motion also passed unanimously at committee. Interestingly, the Toronto Catholic Board was inspired by the content of this motion and brought forward the same one the following day! This was a welcome surprise, since when boards allocate for the same things, it sends a strong message to the government about the significance of these priorities and needs.

NEW: TUESDAY COVID-19 COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETINGS

Recently, Trustees voted to establish weekly meetings every Tuesday to allow us to receive public updates from the Director of the TDSB, have staff provide answers to our questions, and allow us to bring forward emergency business related to Covid-19. These virtual meetings will be open to the public through a live webcast, and will provide all of us with important information about the current situation and planning for the summer and next year. ***Also, with respect to the motion passed by our Board regarding online learning discussed above, our Director has committed to updating Trustees on progress and next steps on the implementation of this motion each week at these Covid-19 meetings.*** To watch the live webcast, click [here](#). If you cannot tune in live, but wish to watch past meetings (including all Board, Committee of the Whole and Standing Committee meetings), these are archived and available for viewing through this [link](#).

DELEGATION PROCESS - ADDRESSING A COMMITTEE

As in our usual practice, delegation requests will still be accepted during the closure of all schools and administrative sites at the Toronto District School Board. The only difference is that oral delegations to address a committee of the Board will be presented by phone. To submit a delegation request (written or oral), please refer to the information [here](#). If your request is approved, further details will be provided to you via email.

ACCESSING ITEMS LEFT AT SCHOOL

One question many parents have asked is when they (or their children) might be allowed to enter schools to retrieve belongings left behind at March Break. We have finally been given the go ahead from the Ministry of Education to begin developing a procedure to allow this to happen in June. As soon as a plan is approved, we will communicate details on how this will work. Stay tuned!

PLAYGROUND AND OUTDOOR SCHOOL SPACE CLOSURES

We are still hearing that families and individuals are continuing to use TDSB outdoor spaces. While we understand children and adults need fresh air and outdoor activity, our grounds remain officially closed and off limits to all for the safety and well-being of our communities. Please be respectful of the situation and your community and follow the rules laid out by Public Health, our City, our Province and our Country. Physical distancing and staying home as much as possible is the safest and fastest way out of this pandemic, and everyone needs to comply for it to work effectively. If we are instructed to begin relaxing these rules, we will communicate these changes to our families.

211- HELP IS A PHONE CALL or CLICK AWAY

Have you heard of 211? Calling or texting 211 in Toronto connects people to community and social services quickly and easily so they can get the help they need. Operators can connect individuals to over 4,000 social and community services, such as government services, financial assistance, employment assistance, childcare, food, clothing and shelter. In addition, calling 211 offers 24/7 confidential services in 150 languages. You can also connect with 211 online through this website: www.211toronto.ca.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

This is a stressful time for both students and parents. TDSB has put together a list of links to vetted, data-driven resources to help families cope during this uncertain time. These can be found on the home page of our [website](#) or by clicking [here](#). You can always reach out to your children's teachers or principals if you are concerned about your children, and they can help connect you with our school social workers or community agencies.

Finally, thank you to all of you who have reached out to me to offer support, provide feedback, and ask questions. Although I too am a parent in this system, your experiences and insights provide me with important feedback and context for my job in supporting you and your families. And to those of you who are on the front lines -- working in grocery stores, pharmacies, gas stations, emergency response, and hospitals -- a huge thank you from the bottom of my heart for all that you are doing for our community, our city and our country.

Yours truly,

Rachel

Rachel Chernos Lin
Ward 11 Trustee, Toronto District School Board



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