

If this was a regular Friday at school, this broadcast would be bringing you information about school activities and what was planned for the week (and weeks) ahead. The focus certainly has changed in the last month. I try, with my broadcasts to our school community, to keep students and parents/guardians informed and up-to-date regarding our current situation, just as at the system level we are trying to do the same (see Harbord and/or TDSB websites for regular updates).

This week I thought I would bring you a glimpse of how school is operating behind the scenes at the administrative/school level. Typically each morning, the VPs Massey and Witt and I meet in Google Hangout to discuss the day ahead and what needs our immediate attention. Besides our own Google Hangout, we have several Google Hangouts set up with various school stakeholders. We have Hangouts with our Assistant Curriculum Leaders (ACLs), our Tech Team (teachers with strong technological skills who have provided their expertise to Admin and teachers), and a Student Services group that works with counsellors on student issues. We have regular meetings as well as open chats that go back and forth throughout the day as questions/situations arise. These on-line forums have been essential for us to be able to run the school.

When we meet with the ACLs, they bring us emerging issues and questions from their curricular areas. These issues are discussed as a group (There are 19 of us in total) and we try to plan using all of their input and feedback. We problem-solve and discover the best methods for a variety of tasks. The ACLs in turn take back our questions and directives to teachers. This method of communication seems to be working fairly well. We are also regularly in touch with individual teachers who may have unique concerns that Admin must address.

The Admin are involved in virtual meetings, typically, twice a week with our school Superintendent Mike Gallagher. Our meetings are with secondary VPs and Ps only, which allows us to focus on issues unique to secondary school and to receive communication/information/directives from the TDSB.

This week a large portion of our focus was on collecting the marks for our grade 12's. If you are a parent of a grade 12 student you know that this time of the year is an exciting albeit anxious one for our graduating students as they await news of acceptance to post-secondary. Our grade 12's have done well and we are hopeful that they are accepted into their program of choice. I follow several universities on Instagram and this week Western University posted that they are lowering the entrance requirements in some of their programs. I was glad to read this as it appears the universities are understanding the strain that has been placed on grade 12 students and are recognizing the need to accommodate them. It reminds me of the considerations given to students graduating in the double cohort year (some of you may remember that time as well).

VP Massey and I have been working with our school Staffing Committee as well. This Committee is responsible for looking at the student course selections and the allocation of teachers next year, and determining what classes will run based on student interest and teacher allocation. This is a long process that started when your student(s) filled in their course selection sheet on MyBlueprint. Once these decisions have been made, the timetable for next year begins to be built. This will be Ms. Massey's task in the weeks to come and it has been made more complicated as the timetable needs to be built remotely and without the benefit of the in-person technical support of our central TDSB Timetabling personnel.

These are busy days indeed, and there is no shortage of challenges each day. However, throughout all of these challenges I have seen a tremendous commitment to the students and community at Harbord. Our school has supported the system by loaning many of our devices to the TDSB so that they may be distributed to students in need from K to 12. We have identified families within our school community who may be facing a variety of hardships and have ensured they are being supported at both the school and system level. We have reached out to students who we know struggle with mental health and wellbeing issues and have identified teams of teachers and support personnel (counsellors, Social Worker, CYW and external agencies) who can support these students, and we have worked with parents and families to help them manage the needs of their student(s) and the family needs at home.

Throughout this work the level of commitment by Harbord's staff has been outstanding. I need to also say a huge thank you to you! The Admin and teachers have, many times over, received words of encouragement and support from you. The last three weeks have not been perfect, but I believe we are doing a very good job in this unpredictable and challenging time. Thank you for supporting the Harbord community – we are very appreciative of this support.

In my bulletin to students yesterday, I mentioned that we have created the @harbordcollegiateofficial Instagram account and I told students we need their help – we would like them to submit pictures to my email account of school events, student activity, sports – any pictures that will bring smiles to people's faces and help us find joy. I reminded students about the on-line code of conduct in terms of their comments to posts. We will also ensure that media releases have been signed, if there are close ups of students. And we will ensure that our student photographers are credited for the photos posted! We are hopeful the Instagram account will make our school community feel closer together, even though we are not!

Have a good weekend – the weather is supposed to be improving – we could all use some warm, sunny spring days! Take care, stay safe and we will speak again soon.

Cynthia Abernethy