



December 21st, 2020

Dear Waterloo Catholic Community –

As you know we have commenced our well-deserved Christmas Break and we hope that for each of you, it is starting as well as it can under our current circumstances. No doubt you are likely also aware, the Premier of the Province has indicated that the return to school in January will be remote. That is, on January 4th both our elementary and our secondary students will begin the new year learning virtually. The decision is being made out of an abundance of caution. We know our schools are safe. The cases of COVID are not starting, nor are they spreading, in our schools, but we are a reflection of the community. Closing the schools to in person learning for the early part of January will help us contain the cases that come into schools and ensure that when we return to our buildings, we are doing so in the safest manner possible.

Our **elementary schools** will return to face-to-face learning on **Monday January 11th, 2021** and our **secondary schools** will return to face to face learning on **Monday January 25th, 2021**.

Just before we left for the break, we were given an indication that the government might choose a remote return in January. Given the short timelines, we made a “best efforts” attempt to send home Chromebooks with all those students for whom we had a prior request through our comprehensive survey. If there are outstanding orders that were missed, they will be deployed upon our return on January 4th. Schools and Extended Day programs currently remain closed and unavailable to staff, students and parents. All school staff and teachers are on a well-deserved break and will be available for questions and updates **as of January 4th, 2021**.

The move to remote learning will be different than last spring when the face-to-face hours with teachers was limited. The school day will follow the bell times of your individual school and if not already received, you/your student will be given a clear indication of the daily schedule your child is to follow through your local school. Again, we might expect that the first day or two back in January may not be perfectly smooth as we all adjust to the new reality. St Isidore students will continue as per the usual schedule.

For our high needs special education students we would like to provide the following guidance. In elementary, students with high needs will learn remotely as with the rest of your class and per the class daily schedule, but there will be “break-out” rooms where additional support is possible. Your return to face-to-face learning will be January 11th 2020. For secondary high need students, you will also leaning virtually for the first week back (again with breakout rooms) and by January 11th we will provide more detail with an option for transportation and face to face learning in your local school setting.



As of today, we are still planning to proceed with our Secondary Transition Survey regarding quadesters 3 and 4. The current decision to move to virtual is a short-term strategy and there will be a return to face to face learning on January 25th (as we near the end of quadmester 2). Please keep in mind if you choose “face to face learning in the bricks and mortar schools” or if you choose “virtual” *that is your choice through to the end of June.*

Thank you for adhering to public health and safety measures that have ensured schools remain a safe place for our students and staff. This will be more important than ever now – both for our schools and for our community at large. During the upcoming Christmas Break we must adhere to the guidance to limit our contacts and social gatherings. You can check the government’s [holiday web page](#) for more direct and up-to-date guidance on how individuals and families can plan for a safe holiday season, including suggestions for safer holiday activities for children and families.

Once again, we encourage you to visit [Ontario.ca/covidresponse](https://www.ontario.ca/covidresponse) to learn what public health measures are in place in our community – but also please be aware that these could change depending on the most current public health advice. We also suggest checking out the WCDSB website <https://www.wcdsb.ca/living-learning-looking-forward/> and Region of Waterloo Public Health website <https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/health-and-wellness/2019-novel-coronavirus.aspx> as they contain helpful resources and supports. If you have any questions about what your particular school is doing, please let your school principal know upon their return on January 4th, 2021.

I will also take this opportunity to point out that mental health resources are available to students and families through Kids Help Phone, which offers 24/7 counselling and referral services across the province. To use this free resource, children can call 1-800-668-6868, or text CONNECT to 686868.

This is likely not the Christmas any of us envisioned or desired. These challenges are real and the hardships can be quite difficult for some. But we can see the light in the distance. We can also see the profound light of the manger. Let us continue to be people of hope who celebrate the birth of a tiny babe who shared a powerful message of love and salvation. Please reach out to us if you need help or guidance, and remain confident that we are here to support you, as we walk together as a hope-filled community. *#InThisTogether #WeGotThis*

Sincerely,

Loretta Notten
Director of Education

