



February 22nd, 2021

Dear Waterloo Catholic Community –

As we approach the end of February, we sincerely hope that this letter finds you and your family well. Today's letter brings a number of very important updates that are important to continuing to provide safe, welcoming learning environments for all our Waterloo Catholic staff and students. Please take the time to read each of these updates, and do not hesitate to reach out to your local school if there are items for which you require further information or clarification.

On Wednesday, February 17th the Minister of Education, informed by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, informed all school boards that there was an enhancement that would be adopted in terms of both screening and isolation guidance, as well as testing opportunities. Please see below for these and other updates.

Screening: Staff and students continue to be required to Self Screen before arriving at school (or immediately upon arrival). Confirmation of screening continues to be required for all staff and our secondary students. The change is that the new provincial direction requires that staff, students and children with **any new or worsening symptom** of COVID-19, as indicated in the school and child care screening tool, even those with **only one symptom**, must stay home until:

- They receive a negative COVID-19 test result.
- They receive an alternative diagnosis by a health care professional, or
- It has been 10 days since their symptom onset and they are feeling better.

The student self-screener is found here: [COVID-19 school and child care screening](#)

Isolation requirements:

Further – all asymptomatic *household* contacts (siblings, parents, grandparents) of symptomatic individuals are required to quarantine until the symptomatic household member:

- receives a negative COVID-19 test result, or
- receives an alternative diagnosis by a health care professional

If the symptomatic individual **tests positive**, or is **not tested** and does not receive an alternative diagnosis from a health care professional, the symptomatic individual must isolate (including from household members) for 10 days from symptom onset, and all household contacts must isolate until 14 days from their last contact with the symptomatic individual.

We realize this is a significant change and requirement for a family. This is by provincial order and does not just apply to the education sector, but everyone in the province. We may have to close some schools if too many staff are affected by this new requirement. We will make every effort to avoid this reality.



Targeted Testing:

On February 16th, 2021 The Ministry informed us of some enhancements to Testing that will be implemented provincially. These include:

- **Community Testing in selected sites:** These are additional centers for any community member who is trying to access testing due to symptoms or as a result of being a contact. You will receive a letter if your school community is being offered this service.
- **Increased Staff Testing:** All asymptomatic staff have the ability to access selected community Pharmacies if they feel they want to access a test.
- **Targeted Testing for staff and students of selected schools:** The Ministry has contracted companies to help in administering COVID tests to 5% of the schools within the Board (2-3 per week), representing 2% of our student population. This service is for asymptomatic staff and students. You will receive a letter if your community / school is being offered the opportunity. It is fully voluntary and free of cost. Clinics will run on weekends.

March Break:

On February 11th, The Minister also announced that March Break would be postponed. We realize this is a disappointing development for children and families, but the good news it has not been cancelled altogether. The Break will now occur after Easter, in the week of **April 12th -16th**. We look forward to the well-deserved rest all staff and students will have the opportunity to enjoy in April. Schools will communicate some changes that will occur in secondary as a result of this shift in dates.

Elementary Transition Survey:

We administered the elementary transition **survey from February 16th – 18th**, immediately after Family Day Weekend. The official transition date for any student who chose to change their learning method will be **Monday March 8th, 2021**.

The results saw almost equal movement both ways – with 262 students moving to virtual learning at St Isidore and 290 students making the move back to in person learning. This will necessitate some class re-organization but we are hoping that it will be minimized. As previously indicated, there will be no more movement from one mode to the other for the remainder of the year.

Graduations:

We have made a decision that all elementary and secondary graduations will be virtual /adapted once again this year. All indications would seem to suggest that while we hope to be in a much better place in terms of COVID transmission by the later spring and summer months, but planning starts much sooner than that. We do not have enough assurances that large gatherings will be possible by then, so we have made a proactive decision that we will not run a traditional graduation celebration. Your local school will be in touch about how this will be approached in your local site.



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 reach out to your local school principal.

I will continue to remind all community members 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.

If there are any further updates we will certainly share them as soon as possible. Please know that we continue to be in this together and day by day we will make it through. Thank you for all that you have done to walk with us through this time. As we journey toward Lent toward our Easter Season, let's continue to remain people of hope, informed by our Faith. 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*

Sincerely,

Loretta Notten
Director of Education

