INTERNATIONAL CONNECTION NEWSLETTER

Waterloo Catholic District School Board | April 2020

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Message from COO of International Education

The Minister of Education has announced today that he has extended the school closure until May 31, 2020. Read the Ministry of Education News Release.

According to UNESCO, COVID-19 has impacted 90% of students around the world, leaving more than 1.3 billion learners unable to attend regular classes in schools. You will see in the provincial news release below that school closures have been extended to at least May 31st. It is still uncertain as to whether schools will open at all in June. To that end, we have been receiving an increasing number of questions around when students can begin to schedule flights home. We believe the best place for you to complete your learning is in Waterloo region. This gives teaching staff the best opportunity to connect with you and support you in your learning. The last day of exams for high school students is June 23 for grade 9 to 11 students, and June 19 for grade 12 students. Given the uncertainty of schools reopening in June, it is best to schedule your return flights after exams are completed. If you have questions regarding returning home please don’t hesitate to connect with our Program Manager of International Education, Margo Jones at margo.jones@wcdsb.ca to discuss your options.

For those returning to study in September, it is important that you carefully evaluate your summer plans and ensure you have all the necessary documentation in place to return in September. If there are any doubts about your ability to re-enter Canada in September, we strongly encourage you to consider remaining in Canada for the summer. This even includes students who are graduating in June with plans to attend a Canadian College or University in September. Once again, if you have any questions in this regard please don’t hesitate to connect with our Program Manager of International Education, Margo Jones at margo.jones@wcdsb.ca to discuss your options.

Students who are new to our system in September should plan to arrive mid-August. This will allow for the necessary assessments, course selection and planning to occur. There will also be a variety of orientation activities planned to help you become more familiar with our local communities, your school and homestay families. As you become more familiar with our local communities, your school and homestay families. As well it will be a great time to make new friends and connect with students from the school you will be attending, prior to the start of the school year.

Although there still is a great deal of uncertainty as to if or when schools will open before the end of June, we are working hard to prepare for a full startup of classes in September, and the excitement of a new school year. Wishing you good health and wellness in the days ahead.

Dan Witt, Chief Operating Officer
International Education, Waterloo Catholic District School Board

Online Learning Information

With the recent announcements from Ontario Premier Doug Ford and Minister of Education Stephen Lecce, we know that this new, hopefully temporary, reality will extend at least to the end of May. Teachers, students and parents/guardians have generally reported a positive start to the changing learning environment; however, as could be expected, there were some challenges too. Students and parents/guardians should be sure to communicate with classroom teachers should any issues or questions arise.

We are committed to ensuring students continue to receive grade specific, curriculum-based learning tasks, consistent with the Ministry of Education’s guidelines, during this period of distance learning. Students will also receive feedback and/or assessment/evaluation of their learning from their classroom teachers which will continue to move their learning forward. Students will also be receiving final grades at the end of the semester or term.

A special note for any students who may be graduating this year. Mid-term marks will be submitted to Colleges and Universities at the end of April. This timeline will allow for students to complete missing assignments and upgrade their marks with new assignments. Please continue to be in contact with classroom teachers to ensure that you are meeting requirements. Due to the need for Social Distancing, the Ministry of Education has also waived the Literacy Test and 40 hours of Community Service requirements for students graduating this year. Grade 12 students should contact their school Guidance Counsellors for more information.

Some parents and students have inquired whether distance learning is optional. Please note that distance learning is NOT optional. It is taking the place of regular classroom learning and the expectation is that all students will complete the learning tasks provided by their teachers. Some parents and students have chosen to augment distance learning with resources such as those found on #STEAMDays, WCDSBLearn@Home, the Ministry’s Learn at Home website, or purchased resources/workbooks. These are all great ideas, but please remember students’ first learning priority must remain the schoolwork provided by their teachers.

Finally, we know that there are many stressors that are associated with learning from home, feelings of being isolated and worry about those in our families we cannot be with. Please be sure to take time to pay attention to your own wellness, including getting enough sleep, eating well and being physically active each day. If students are struggling with completing work or feeling well, please be sure to let your school guidance counsellor know, so he or she can support you.

WCDSB D2L Platform*
Google Classroom*
OneNote Classroom*

Please call the device support number below for issues such as connecting to the internet or hardware issues with WCDSB-owned devices.

Hours of support are 8AM to 4PM, Monday to Friday.

519-578-3677 Ext: 2316
For the past three weeks we have begun the journey into Educator-led learning and it could not have been done without the tremendous efforts of so many. We are most appreciative to our staff who have worked so hard to put provisions in place so that we could reach all of our students. We hope that every student continues to have contact with their teacher(s) and that each one knows that we care for and value each of them. Your teachers are truly amazing and they are definitely here for you. We will reiterate that our most pressing concern remains student well being – both mentally and physically. As we have said before, it is not “business as usual”, but we do hope that students are connecting with their teachers as this is our “new normal” for the time being.

We wanted to provide you updates on a few different topics of interest to you and your children. Know that this is a rapidly changing landscape and with many uncertainties, and as there are many players to both consult and work with, as well as others who provide us vital direction or information, sometimes full clarity takes a little time.

As always, on our WCDSB website you will find from our homepage a link to WCDSBLearn@Home where a host of additional resources for all learners will be found. We also encourage you to continue to visit our WCDSBPray@Home webpage as well as our FAQ page. You can also follow the #STEAMDays hashtag where lots of fun and engaging activities are being posted. With that said, a few updates:

**Expectations During Distance Learning:** We realize there are different realities for all of our students and all of our educators. For that reason, each student and teacher is held to the guidelines the Ministry has provided for minimum hours. To review what we have shared previously – the suggested hours reflect both the time a teacher might use in providing formative instruction or guidance, as well as the time the student will spend completing learning tasks or activities. There is not a firm expectation that all students have to be online at the exact same time, although in some cases that might happen on occasion.

**Assessment and Evaluation:** Equity has been a significant consideration in this new landscape as not all children are equally positioned to succeed to the best of their ability when learning from home. We also know that students learning from home can place added pressure on a parent who may be juggling their own work or family related responsibilities. For these reasons, assessment in elementary is taking the form of feedback or formative assessment, rather than grading. Students can benefit and continue progressing through this feedback. For our students in secondary, they will receive both formative and summative assessments – that is feedback and grades, but teachers will be working to support a student’s best outcome and will not be penalized if the current circumstances detract from their ability to succeed. Marks will not drop below that attained on March 13th, when schools were declared closed. There is however every opportunity for a mark to improve, and for learning and achievement to be enhanced.

**Report Cards:** There will be a report card in June for all students and they will contain grades. As noted above, those grades will be largely informed by the marks students had attained prior to March 13th, but there is every opportunity for those grades to improve based on any work submitted during this time of distance learning, if there is evidence of growth and/or improved performance. In the case of graduating students, midterm marks were sent to the Universities and Colleges to assist with post-secondary admission.

**Graduation:** We know that graduation is a significant event in the life of a student and his/her family. For this reason, this has been a difficult decision. Our secondary schools have no option but to postpone graduation ceremonies as a result of venues not being available to us. As you can appreciate secondary graduations are often large events and so they are not easily accommodated in alternate settings. We have made the decision that all of our secondary schools will hold their graduations in the fall. This will in no way impact a student’s ability to actually graduate from high school should they meet the requirements. We are still in the process of finalizing our decision in relation to grade 8 graduations and will communicate that information as soon as a final decision has been achieved.

Finally – we encourage you to closely follow any and all directives from our governments and Waterloo Region Public Health. As a local and global community – we have never been more connected by an event or issue and now is the time to do everything we can to ensure we can soon return to life as we knew it not so long ago. As an Easter people we believe in the power of the resurrection and the promise of new life. Certainly this signs of the season affirm that we can soon return to life as we knew it not so long ago. As an Easter people we believe in the power of the resurrection and the promise of new life.

**Mental Health & Wellness**

**Dealing with STRESS During the Covid-19 Outbreak**

Undoubtedly, the current situation is one that has been a cause of stress for many people. People deal with stress in different ways, some better than others. If you or someone you know is currently in crisis, please call Here 24/7 at 1 (844) 437-3247 any time 24/7, or if it is a critical medical situation dial 911-1.

COVID-19 has and will impact the mental well-being of people everywhere. School Mental Health Ontario has some tips and resources to help support student mental health – along with a youth-focused Mental Health hub. We are fortunate to have access to many online tools that help us keep in touch with our family and friends. Whether it be through Social Media channels, video chats, a phone call, or a simple text message, please stay connected and reach out to someone if you are feeling alone.

Please use the links below for more information:

- [https://smho-smso.ca/covid-19/](https://smho-smso.ca/covid-19/)
The safety and wellbeing of our students and staff is always our top priority. We encourage everyone to remain vigilant regarding hand hygiene and cough/sneeze etiquette and to follow all Public Health guidance and directives.

At this time, Public Health advises the following steps to be followed by residents of Waterloo Region:

- People are to stay home unless they need to purchase groceries or other necessities.
- Practice physical distancing. This means keeping a 2 meter distance between yourself and other people.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash and/or cough or sneeze into the crook of your arm, not into your hands.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

This is a reminder for Long-Term International students that all payments are due by May 1 for the 2020-21 school year. If you have not yet made payment, your spot is not guaranteed. Please remember to send in the receipt of payment to Jody Fritz by email jody.fritz@wcdsb.ca.

Many students will be renewing and extending their Study Permits and Visa’s over the coming months. Canada has now implemented effective January 1st, 2020 Biometrics for individuals who have not completed in the past. This may extend the time it takes to receive new documents from Canada Immigration. Please start working on applications six months prior to the expiry date to ensure you have all the necessary documents for travelling completed in time.

**COVID-19 Update from Public Health**


WASH YOUR HANDS.

1. Wet hands with warm water
2. Apply soap
3. For at least 20 seconds, make sure to wash:
   - palm and back of each hand
   - between fingers
   - under nails
   - thumbs
4. Rinse well
5. Dry hands well with paper towel
6. Turn off tap using paper towel

1-833-784-4397
canada.ca/coronavirus