

RETURN TO LEARN GUIDE 2020/2021

September 4, 2020



**SIMCOE MUSKOKA CATHOLIC
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD**

A MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION CATHERINE MCCULLOUGH



Dear SMCDSB Families, Staff and Community Partners:

Last spring we sent our students home for March Break and at that time we could not have imagined how the world has changed. This pandemic has impacted the way we live and interact in our homes and our communities. Teaching and learning for our students and staff has also changed.

Our government, with the best advice of public health officials, has provided directives, guidance and support in response to this pandemic. And the people of Ontario have listened. As we approach back to school, COVID-19 case counts in Simcoe County and the Districts of Muskoka and Parry Sound are very low and as a result we are well-positioned to reopen schools.

The return to class for our students and staff will be done carefully, with enhanced health and safety protocols in place and with guidance and direction from our local Health Units. This approach has worked successfully for our province when we moved through the phases of reopening the economy and this approach will ensure we are equally prepared for the return to school.

We are excited to welcome our students back to school because we know that many students do better in class with their teacher and peers. We also recognize that every family's situation is different and that a return to the classroom may not be the best option for their child(ren). This *Return to Learn Guide* will provide you with information about our in-class and remote learning models for students. The guide also outlines the enhanced health and safety measures that will be in place as well as information that focuses on mental health and well-being.

Our decisions and planning place students at the centre and focus on four pillars:

- Making decisions and plans that are rooted in faith, hope, compassion and inclusion
- Ensuring a safe and healthy environment for students and staff
- Returning to exceptional teaching and learning - in-class or remotely
- Focussing on mental health and well-being

Our students rely on us for their academic success, their mental well-being and most especially their health and safety. It will take cooperation and compassion to address the challenges ahead and we must all work together with the common goal of providing our children with the best learning experience, in the safest possible environment. Simcoe Muskoka Catholic is prepared to welcome our students back to school.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Catherine McCullough', written in a cursive style.

Catherine McCullough
Interim Director of Education



RETURN TO SCHOOL HIGHLIGHTS

Our plan is based on four pillars:

- Making decisions that are rooted in faith, hope, compassion and inclusion
- Ensuring a safe and healthy environment for students and staff
- Returning to exceptional teaching and learning - in-class or remotely
- Focussing on mental health and wellbeing



FAITH



HEALTH AND
SAFETY



LEARNING AND
INSTRUCTION



MENTAL
HEALTH AND
WELL BEING



- Our plan is based on the very best advice of public health officials
- Many students do better at school in class with their teacher and peers
- We are prepared for schools to reopen
- We are committed to open, honest and timely communication
- Remote learning will mirror in-class learning as much as possible
- Remote learning students will only be able to re-enter in-class learning at designated points in the school year
- Students are permitted to wear their own masks that meet public health standards
- Staff will be wearing personal protective equipment
- There is a protocol to quickly identify and isolate cases of COVID-19 in schools
- Many enhanced health and safety measures are in place
- We are all in this together - leadership, staff, parents and students all have to do their part
- We are flexible and responsive - we will make changes as needed as the situation evolves





FAITH



HEALTH AND
SAFETY



LEARNING AND
INSTRUCTION



MENTAL
HEALTH AND
WELL BEING

*"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure."
(Heb 6:19)*

As we prepare to head back to school this year, there are many important details that we are focussing on—details about health and safety, about staffing, facilities, transportation and supplies. For us as a Catholic school board, however, our primary frame of reference is always the values that inspire who we are and what we do. Four values in particular are guiding us as we begin this September:

FAITH

Our belief in God is at the heart of our school system. We know that God is always with us (especially in times like these), calling us to love Him and love others, as we live out the Gospel teachings of Jesus. Through prayer, community and the sacraments, we root ourselves each day in our Catholic Christian way of life, making our schools places of welcome, celebration and relationship.

COMPASSION

As Christians, we try to be sensitive to the needs and difficulties of those who struggle in our communities and our world, to offer them our friendship and kindness, and to do whatever we can to help them. We open our eyes and hearts to the painful situations of our world, responding with generosity and concern, and seeking to create a more loving and supportive society, where everyone is cared for.

HOPE

In confusing and difficult times, we look to Jesus as the source of our hope. The new life He reveals helps us look forward with eagerness and trust, confident that the future holds blessings and joy. Our faith keeps us from becoming discouraged as we journey with Jesus toward a promising (but unknown) future. It reminds us that we are builders of that future, through our daily choices and actions, and through the support we offer each other.

INCLUSION

God's family embraces everyone, without exception! All of the characteristics that make us special and different as individuals, including our physical abilities and cultures, our languages, identities and family backgrounds, enrich our school communities. We seek to ensure that every student feels welcomed, valued and supported, and has the tools and opportunities to excel in their own unique way.

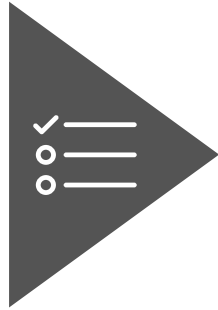
"Once you choose hope, anything's possible." (Christopher Reeve)



HEALTH AND SAFETY

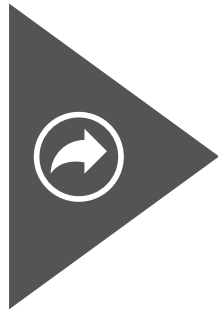
ENSURING A SAFE AND HEALTHY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

We are building the foundation for a safe and healthy school environment, based on the very best advice of public health officials. You can't build a foundation using one brick and you can't build a strong foundation all by yourself. Imagine each measure of enhanced health and safety as a brick. We need to work together to put all of these bricks in place in order to ensure the safest possible school environment for our students and staff.



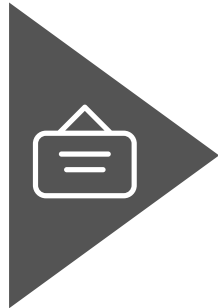
Self-Screening

All staff and students will complete a Daily Health Screening checklist every day before attending school or work.



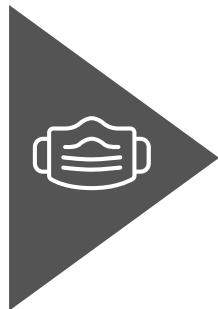
Flow of Traffic/Signage to Facilitate Physical Distancing

One-way use of hallways, adjustments to recess and lunch breaks, changes to entrance and exit practices, adjustments to the use of playgrounds.



Signage

Signage posted throughout the school to reinforce physical distancing, hallway direction, hand hygiene, room capacity, etc.



Masks

Students in Grades 4 to 12 will be required to wear non-medical or cloth masks inside the school, including in hallways and during classes. Students in Kindergarten to Grade 3 will be encouraged, but not required to wear masks in indoor spaces. Students are permitted to wear their own masks that meet public health standards. Staff will be provided with appropriate personal protective equipment.



Hand Hygiene

Hand sanitizer stations will be in every class and in selected common areas. Students will be directed to wash their hands at appropriate times during the school day. Students and staff are permitted to bring their own, scent-free hand sanitizer and wipes to school.



HEALTH AND SAFETY

ENSURING A SAFE AND HEALTHY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT



Physical Distancing

Physical distancing, which includes remaining 2 metres apart, will be promoted between students and staff. The physical distancing measures will be reinforced through adaptations to the schedule, cohorting of students, flow of traffic and signage.



Student Cohorts

Students in elementary and high school will be cohorted with their classmates and there will be limited contact with other subject teachers. The maximum number of student contacts at the elementary level is 50 and at the secondary level student contacts will be limited to no more than 100 in each quadmester.



Enhanced Cleaning Protocols

Custodial staff will complete ongoing, enhanced cleaning at schools and board office locations, including twice-daily, and once in the evening, cleaning of desktops, common touch points and washroom facilities. In addition, we are receiving funding from the Ministry to add additional custodial time in our schools. Upgraded filters are being installed in every school.



Following the COVID-19 Protocol for Suspected or Confirmed Cases

All students and staff will be required to follow a protocol (based on the guidance of the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit) when dealing with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19.





HEALTH AND SAFETY

ENSURING A SAFE AND HEALTHY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

ROLE OF FAMILIES

Families play a critical role in supporting health and safety in our school communities. The most important thing families can do to help mitigate the transmission of COVID-19, is to screen their children daily for any COVID-19 symptoms and keep them home from school if they are sick or have had close contact with anyone diagnosed with COVID-19.

Parents/guardians should also encourage their child to adhere to the health and safety measures put in place by their school, including following physical distancing, practicing good hygiene habits, including hand washing, and wearing a mask as appropriate.

We are asking parents/guardians to support schools by complying with the following:

- Complete the Daily Health Screening checklist with your child(ren) BEFORE they attend school or take the school bus;;
- Keep your child at home when they feel unwell;
- Have a plan to pick-up your child(ren) promptly if they develop symptoms;
- Seek a COVID-19 test when your child exhibits symptoms;
- In the absence of a test, have your child self-isolate for 14 days and be symptom-free for 24 hours prior to returning to school;
- Comply with any order provided by Public Health;
- Siblings of a sick child may still attend school, but MUST self-monitor for 14 days.





ENSURING A SAFE AND HEALTHY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT



TRANSPORTATION

AT THE BUS STOP...



- Students and parents are expected to respect physical distancing of at least 2 metres at bus stop locations.

ON THE BUS...



- Students will be assigned seats and are required to sit only in their assigned seating.
- Students will be required to wear a mask if they are in Grade 4 to 12 and are encouraged to wear a mask if they are in Kindergarten to Grade 3.
- Bus drivers will be provided and will wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Hand sanitizer and additional face masks will be provided on the bus

CLEANING OF BUSES...



- Buses will be sanitized twice daily — once in the morning and once in the afternoon.
- Cleaning will include the sanitization of handrails, seat tops and backs, windowsills, inside and outside door handles, driver console area.

CAPACITY OF BUSES...



- SMCDSB's average bus capacity is typically about 52 students per full size school bus. This year, some families have opted-out of using transportation services and so we expect our buses to be less full than normal.
- The number of students transported on a single bus varies by geographic location and is based on a variety of different factors. The Ministry of Education has indicated a maximum capacity of 70 students per bus (we expect capacity to be lower this year)





RETURNING TO EXCEPTIONAL LEARNING AND INSTRUCTION

ELEMENTARY IN-CLASS LEARNING

- The elementary schedule will look very similar to what you were used to last year.
- Students will be cohorted with their classmates and their homeroom teacher, with limited contact with other subject teachers. The maximum number of student contacts at a school is 50.
- Bell times, i.e., school start and end times will stay the same or very similar to what was in place for your school last year, but entry into the building will be staggered through different entry or exit points in order to ensure students remain in their cohort.
- From Grades 1 to 8, students will have teaching blocks in all subject areas including Religion, French, the Arts, Science and technology and Health and Physical Education.
- Time will be provided everyday for nutrition breaks and outside activities with their student cohort.
- The daily outdoor activities with the classroom cohort will be used to give students a break from wearing masks.
- Physical distancing measures will be implemented outside.
- All learning activities inside and outside the classroom will adhere to public health guidelines such as physical distancing, not sharing materials, etc.
- The Kindergarten program will continue to be play and inquiry based. Kindergarten educators will use small groupings, outdoor spaces, individual materials to provide as rich a learning experience for children as possible.
- There may be some modifications to the schedules in order to meet the cohorting guidelines of no more than 50 contacts.
- Principals will provide more information about teaching assignments and the school day set up prior to the first day of school.
- Families should send students with a healthy lunch and enough snacks for two nutrition breaks as well as a water bottle.



RETURNING TO EXCEPTIONAL LEARNING AND INSTRUCTION

SECONDARY IN-CLASS LEARNING

- High school students will attend five days a week with 300 minutes of class time per day.
- At the secondary level, a student cohort, i.e., number of other students they come into contact with throughout the course of the day at school should not exceed 100.
- In order to maintain this student cohort, secondary schools will be using a quadmester school timetable.
- In a “quadmester” system students will have two periods for $\frac{1}{4}$ of the year as follows:
 - **Quad #1: Period 1 & 2 from September 10 until November 9**
 - **Quad #2: Period 3 & 4 from November 12 until January 28**
 - **Quad #3: Period 5 & 6 from February 3 until April 16**
 - **Quad #4: Period 7 & 8 from April 21 to June 23**
- Students are encouraged to bring a computer, chromebook or tablet if they have one available.
- All students will participate in a 10 minute break and a 40 minute lunch.
- The in-class school schedule will be aligned with the bussing schedules as closely as possible.
- **Course selections and timetables will be confirmed by the school before school starts.**





RETURNING TO EXCEPTIONAL LEARNING AND INSTRUCTION

REMOTE LEARNING

- We are creating a virtual school for elementary and secondary students who have opted for the remote learning program.
- There will be a principal, vice-principal, office & clerical and special education staff assigned to provide administrative support to the virtual school.
- Students will be enrolled in the virtual school and will not have daily connections with their home school (with the exception of some special education students)
- Students will be able to return to their home school at natural transition times in the school year, e.g., the end of the first quadmester in secondary and/or the end of the Progress Reporting period for elementary. Reasonable exceptions may be made on a case by case basis.
- The remote learning program will mirror the in-class learning program as much as possible.
- Students will be clustered into virtual classrooms which will include other students from a number of different schools.
- Students will receive schedules and instruction based on a five hour school day. Instruction will be provided based on the Ontario curriculum expectations across all grades and subject areas.
- Attendance will be taken and students can expect a mixture of live learning sessions as well as video recorded sessions and independent work.
- Assignments will be expected to be completed and teachers will assess and provide feedback on student learning.
- Families who require technology or internet support will be able to access it through the board.





RETURNING TO EXCEPTIONAL LEARNING AND INSTRUCTION

SPECIAL EDUCATION

- We know that our students who have special education needs will require additional support and resources for a smooth transition back to school.
- Board office staff, Special Education Resource Teachers (SERTs) and Educational Assistants (EA's) will provide support and resources to families prior to school start-up.
- All students with special education needs will have attendance options including daily in school attendance or remote learning and will have access to a Special Education Resource Teacher or other specialized staff as per their Individual Education Plan (IEP).
- Students with complex medical needs will also have the option to attend daily and staff will be provided with appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- Remote learning where return to school is not possible will be available. Schools will collaborate with families and health care providers to ensure support is in place to meet the needs of students.
- Specific details about Individual Education Plans (IEPs), specialized equipment and technology, staff supports, etc. are available through our [Special Education Fact Sheet](#) (pdf format) or in the [video resource section](#) of our website.





MENTAL
HEALTH AND
WELL BEING

FOCUSING ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Mental health and well-being is our priority.

- We know that students who feel safe and comfortable in their classroom setting will thrive academically, socially and emotionally. Our overall commitment is to enhance and protect the mental health and well-being of our students.



We lead with compassion and empathy.

- Students will return to school and will have had a wide range of experiences from the past six months due to the pandemic and resulting school closures.
- We understand that parents have many worries as their children return to school.
- We also know there will be an added impact for students who may have experienced systemic racism.
- The unique story of each student will impact how they transition back to school.
- We want to encourage and reassure our students by using best practices and strategies for behavioural and emotional self-regulation to promote positive mental health and emotional well-being.
- A key concept for all of us will be that of “stewardship” which encourages each of us to carefully and responsibly manage ourselves as well as those entrusted to our care.
- We turn stewardship inwards when we practice self-compassion and self-care and outwards when we honour the experiences and validate the emotions of others.





MENTAL
HEALTH AND
WELL BEING

FOCUSING ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Schools are an excellent place to promote student mental health and well-being.

- We are excited to welcome back our students and staff into our schools.
- We know that schools provide many opportunities for children and teens to build positive social-emotional skills, to learn and practice self-care, to reduce stigma, to build skills of resilience and problem-solving and to develop empathy towards others.



We have a strong mental health and well-being foundation to build on.

- We will continue to invest in the mental health of our students.
- We have experienced mental health staff consisting of Psychologists and School Counsellors who provide a range of services including consultation with school staff and parents, counselling for students as well as psychological assessments.
- We also liaise with, and make referrals to, community-based resources.
- We understand that many students may experience elevated anxiety and difficulties adjusting as we return to school this year.
- Educators provide emotional support to students
- Counselling services will be available by our mental health staff in person or virtually as appropriate, with clear referral processes in place.





MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL BEING

FOCUSING ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



Our children are experiencing a range of emotions.

- The collective rates of stress and anxiety have risen in the past six months and the impacts continue to be felt by many including the loss of normal social interactions.
- All children and teens return to school each year feeling both excitement and some anxiety. However this year more than any other, students may be returning to school with a range of emotions.
- It is important that we recognize and validate the feelings of our children and teens.
- As adults we do our best to pause and choose responses that are supportive and help our children to build effective community connections with peers and adults to promote important life skills.
- This can be challenging to do when we may be stressed also. We encourage parents to view our [Parent Videos at smcdsb.on.ca](https://smcdsb.on.ca) to learn more about ways to understand and support children with big emotions.

We need to work together.

- There are still numerous questions we are working through as we prepare to welcome our students back.
- All students, teachers, support staff, administrators, system leaders, school mental health professionals, parents/families and community partners have a shared responsibility to prepare and support one another as we return to school.
- Let's continue to demonstrate our faith as we work collaboratively to build strong school communities and support the mental health and well-being of our students.

