

From transportation to child care, lots to consider as school boards prepare plans for Aug. 4 deadline ^[1]

School boards prepare three educational models for coming school year

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EXCERPTS

As uncertainty prevails, Guelph's local school boards are busy preparing for what the new year in the fall could look like.

Over a week ago, the ministry of education released its approach towards reopening schools for the coming school year and directed school boards to develop plans for three possible scenarios that include an online model, an in-class model, and a blended model of in-class and online learning.

Each school board in the province has been told to prepare their plans by Aug. 4 so they have three possible plans ready to choose from when public health recommends which model is right for the province to adopt in September.

Both the Upper Grand District School Board and the Wellington Catholic District School Board have been working together and with school boards in other regions to develop plans that will be ready by the end of July.

"Now that's a bit of a challenge because we don't really know what we are going to see and so that can make planning difficult but we do intend to prepare our three plans and we will be as prepared as we can be," said Martha Rogers, director of education of the UGDSB.

"There are certain challenges to think about. We're certainly up to it."

"The learning will look different and that's true for students as well as staff," said Michael Glazier, superintendent of education at the WCDSB.

Glazier said the blended learning model is challenging to work with because of the different parameters the board has to work under to plan that such as working with a cohort of 15 students per class.

"There's a lot of things we have to think about in terms of logistics like how do we create those cohorts, how do we move students throughout the school, lots of potential issue in terms of transiting students, transportation of students is also something that we're looking at very closely and the scheduling models. And the scheduling models look different in secondary schools versus elementary schools," said Glazier.

Both Rogers and Glazier stated that transportation poses to be a challenge where buses will only be allowed to transport 24 students when a regular bus holds 72 students.

Rogers said a reoccurring concern she heard from parents is not being able to afford child care if they return back to work and their child is at home.

"Childcare is an issue and that's the one I hear from families the most often," said Rogers adding that she also hears from parents who are nervous and don't want their child to go to school at all.

The ministry of education has stated that school attendance in the fall will be voluntary and based on parent choice as long as public health circumstances require adapted delivery of education.

Both boards have expressed the safety and health of students and staff to be their top priority when school resumes and have been providing mental health services through the summer for students and staff and plan to continue to do so when school resumes.

"We've been working with our mental health lead to make sure that when our staff come back and when our students come back, they feel supported in being able to create that best environment for students so that mental and well benign is going to be at the forefront of our thoughts," said Glazier.

Rogers said having done remote education for the past three months, a lot of the groundwork for home learning has been done.

"We have numerous technical supports, mental health supports, we have a process to deliver printed material to students who require it

because there are some kids who just can't learn via the internet for whatever reason."

Both school boards indicated that things have gone quite well from an education standpoint during the pandemic with staff and students both working hard in the given circumstances.

"There are challenges and that's not to take away from COVID-19 or from people dying of sickness and people dying and all but from a school board standpoint, we have done our very best," said Rogers.

"I'm very appreciative to the staff for everything they've done and I'm also appreciative of our students and families of their hard work and their understanding and their patience."

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