

'It's pretty much become the norm:' Area students head back to class

Catherine Whitnall

Across the Kawarthas, morning school bells have been going off as usual.

But there's nothing 'usual' about this year as parents and schools work co-operatively to meet return to school criteria set out by their school boards and the province.

Roughly 84 per cent of Trillium Lakelands District School Board students are registered to attend school this year. A little more than 3,000 students — roughly 2,300 of them in elementary — are enrolled in the board's Virtual School.

Courtney Brideau is one of the many parents who had no problem sending her children to school. Her son, Karter, is in Grade 5 at Scott Young Public School and her daughter, Aurora, is a Grade 2 student at Lady Eaton Elementary School.

"Our area hasn't had too many cases. I'm very comfortable sending them to school," said Brideau, who is confident her children are "in good hands."

She added: "The school has a wonderful staff who have gone above and beyond to make sure everything is in place and safe for everyone."

In August, Trillium Lakelands made masks mandatory for all students, not just those in grades 4 to 8, as mandated by the government. Brideau doesn't have a problem with the decision.

"It's pretty much become the norm," she said. "I planned on sending her [Aurora] in a mask anyway. Kids are pretty resilient. I think it's us, as parents, that get so worried and worked up about it."

The Brideau siblings went to school one day the first week and are attending Monday, Wednesday and Friday this week — all part of the board's staggered start efforts — before everything returns to 'normal' on Sept. 21.

It's meant a pretty quiet start to work for crossing guard David Howden.

This is Howden's 12th year working at the King Street crosswalk.

"It was a long summer holiday," joked the retired truck driver who kept busy helping a friend with race horses, an industry also stalled by the COVID-19 pandemic. "The kids I've talked to are just happy to be back."

It's meant a few changes to his job, but Howden doesn't mind. He has to mask up each time he helps pedestrians — child and adult alike — across the road, and his whistle has been swapped out for a cowbell.

"It's kind of hard to blow a whistle while you're wearing a mask. And the cowbell is a lot louder too," he said.