

Peterborough/Kawartha school boards not surprised by extended closure

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Extending school closures past April 6 was not a huge surprise to area school boards that have been working to develop options to help students continue learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On Tuesday (March 31), Minister of Education Stephen Lecce announced the government had decided to keep Ontario schools closed until May 4. Childcare centres and private schools will remain closed until at least April 13.

“Many variables have had to be taken into consideration over the last two weeks when it comes to our schools, our staff and our students,” said Trillium Lakelands District School Board director of education Larry Hope.

Since the province ordered the closure, Kawartha and Peterborough school board maintenance, information technology, business and communications staff have been busy securing and monitoring facility systems, ensuring staff have access to programs, share information and keep bills paid, including salaries.

“Kudos go out to everyone who has been able to shift the way they work,” said Hope.

School boards also began working on plans in response to the province’s LearnAtHome initiative during the March Break. Roughly 35,000 individuals participated in a ThoughtExchange exercise put on by the Trillium Lakelands board to discuss plans for the continuity of learning.

Starting Monday (April 6), teacher-led learning will resume across the province. Students will begin receiving communication from their teachers and school board staff to determine the best way children can continue learning during this period.

The Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board has also compiled a list of learning resources (<http://www.kprschools.ca/en/LearningResourceso.html>) to support parents.

To better ensure equitable learning, the ministry has instructed local school boards to offer computers and devices to students who do not have in-home access. Trillium Lakelands has also surveyed all staff and will be distributing equipment to those in need.

“We will have to take into consideration that not everyone has the same access to technology or services,” said Hope. “We may have to use other means, like the phone and the old standby, going through the mail, but we will get the information out there.”

Peterborough, Victoria, Northumberland and Clarington Catholic District School Board director of education Michael Nasello noted, as part of its planning, principals

and teachers will be canvassing families to better understand that need when it comes to access to technology. The board is currently working on solutions to make technology available to all students.

Nasello said the board is also working with the ministry and will engage Special Education Resource Teachers (SERT) to come up with a plan that will provide learning opportunities for all students.

As for graduating students, Hope said they will graduate if “they were on track to do so” before the closures. He noted the province has waived a number of requirements, such as the mandatory community service hours and Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test.

School boards encourage parents to follow them on Twitter and check websites regularly for updates and further information.