

School boards await word on extending school year

Catherine Whitnall

Local administrators are remaining optimistic the coronavirus pandemic, which led to school closures across the country, will not put the year in jeopardy.

Representatives from the Kawartha Pine Ridge, Trillium Lakelands and Peterborough, Victoria, Northumberland and Clarington Catholic district school boards all said the decision to extend the school year will be made by the Ministry of Education.

“These decisions are made by the Ontario government, not by individual school boards. There has been no decision made past April 6 in Ontario as of today [March 18]. The situation is being monitored closely and will be reviewed as that date approaches,” explained PVNCCDSB communications officer Galen Eagle, adding there is no “predetermined tipping point” when it comes to school years.

“We are in uncharted waters and this is something the Ministry of Education will be considering as it monitors the COVID-19 situation.”

If a decision had to be made to extend the school year, a number of factors would be considered including strike days prior to the closure, union contracts and ‘snow days’.

“Right now, it’s still the March Break,” said TLDSB communications director Catherine Shedden. “It’s all very fluid at this point because we don’t know how long this [pandemic] will last. . . There are lots of options being explored both provincially and locally but we honestly don’t know if this will extend past April 5.”

Even still, KPR board chairperson Diane Lloyd will be cramming a bit to get the school year in with just the extra two weeks off.”

Lloyd noted board administration has stayed in close contact with the Ministry for direction regarding COVID-19 but there have been no conversations yet about extending the school year.

“We’re going to have to deal with whatever happens. We listen every day for directives coming from the Ministry and watch closely what is happening locally and around the world,” said Lloyd. “But everything is so up in the air right now. . . It all depends on how long this takes to pass.”

As for students who are graduating and going on to post-secondary in the fall, Eagle said officials from the Ministry of Education are working with the Ontario Universities Application Centre (OUAC) and the Ontario Colleges Application Service (OCAS) to request deadline dates for acceptance be extended given the current situation.

“We have heard that for any graduating students who have not yet completed their Ontario literacy requirement, that requirement will be waived for this year.”

In the meantime, Shedden and her colleagues encourage parents to visit the board website, Twitter and Facebook pages where updates will be posted when available.