

# Kawartha Lakes parents asked for preferences on school start

*Catherine Whitnall*

The first day of school will be much different compared to previous years, but how it will look exactly is still unknown.

However, the Trillium Lakelands District School Board has prepared three specific scenarios and continues to work on contingency plans in advance of Sept. 8.

Trustees approved the board's current plans, presented by superintendent of learning Katherine MacIvor, during a special meeting earlier this month. The board is creating and revising protocols for in-person, remote, and modified school days that align with Ministry of Education and public health guidelines.

But the board knows none is a perfect fit for everyone.

"We're going to make a certain number of people unhappy, we know that. But we also know there is not just one solution," said director of education Larry Hope, adding there's no way to predict how the COVID-19 pandemic will look in two months.

The board is in the process of completing staff and parent handbooks outlining specific protocols and requesting preferences for remote or in-person attendance for September.

In some cases, the board may have to blend options in order to meet unique facets at schools, such as Lady Eaton Elementary School in Omemee that only has kindergarten to Grade 3. Staff have also gone into schools to review classroom sizes to determine desk placement for physical distancing.

At schools that offer technology courses, the board is looking at maximizing student cohorts at 10 and options for hands-on learning for such things as science labs. For physical education, plans are to limit group activities and wear masks, face shields and gloves where necessary.

"This really is an exercise in maximizing people's expectations. This is a very difficult line we're walking," said Hope, adding the board is taking family priorities seriously.

To gain greater insight into this, the board hosted two ThoughtExchange opportunities requesting input from students, parents and staff regarding their experiences in distance learning and their concerns regarding planning for a September reopening. Key themes emphasized the need for enhanced cleaning and safety protocols, supports for mental health and wellbeing, a student and parent preference for in person learning and monitoring student workload.

The board will seek further direction from the Ministry at the end of July.