

Here's what we know about the staggered start for local public schools

Catherine Whitnall

With just weeks remaining before students head back to school, local school boards are working on adjusting plans in the wake of added information and funding from the province.

On Aug. 14, Education Minister Stephen Lecce announced boards could stagger school starts for the first week to help introduce students to the new COVID-19 pandemic protocols and routines.

Both the Kawartha Pine Ridge and Trillium Lakelands district school boards have decided to take advantage of the option.

The Trillium Lakelands plan is to have half of each class attend Tuesday and Thursday for the first week of school, with the other half attending Wednesday and Friday. This applies to both elementary and secondary students with everyone attending, every day, starting Sept. 14.

Classes will already be smaller than usual based on results from a pre-registration request sent to families earlier this month. To date, 92 per cent of forms have been returned with 85 per cent of parents and caregivers planning to send their children to school. The remaining students - 1,600 elementary and 534 secondary - will be learning online courtesy of a separately staffed remote virtual school.

Kawartha Pine Ridge's staggered start plan will allow different grades or students to return on different days. More information will be shared to parents through schools as these schedules are finalized.

“This will be a school year unlike any other, and we want to have a successful start for everyone. Providing a slower start to the year will help both students and staff become comfortable with these new practices,” explains board chair Diane Lloyd noting back to school plans have “come a long way” since boards were directed by the province to create them back in June.

“The big thing for parents to understand is what’s happening for their children and in our schools is very fluid. . . But our focus has, and always will be, on safety for our students, our staff and our families.”

Peterborough, Victoria, Northumberland and Clarington Catholic District School Board director of education Michael Nasello said the board will look into the possibility “in the days ahead as we continue to develop our plan for reopening.”

“The plan as it stands to date is available on our school board website, as is the form which we are asking all families to fill in for us [by Aug. 20], indicating their intentions for

September," said Nasello.

Of the parents and caregivers who have responded so far, roughly 10 per cent - or about 1,500 students - will be staying home.