

Parents Who Can't Afford Internet For Online Learning Still Waiting For Help Promised By The Government

By Jennifer Walker - January 17, 2021



Photo by Meru Bi from Pexels

KAWARTHA LAKES-Stephanie Telford feels like the education system has let her down.

The local mom of two kids in Junior Kindergarten and Grade 2 says having her kids home from school hasn't been easy as she juggles a new job while her husband has recently been laid off.

The family of four has felt the negative effects of the pandemic and say they simply cannot afford to sign up for a one year contract for high speed internet at this time.

But while the school board has said that they will provide families with assistance during shut downs, Telford says that has not been her experience during these difficult times.

"Essentially I feel let down by the education system," she said. "Our principal has been very hot and cold, she doesn't seem to know what is going on, one second it's yes I can do this then the

next day its basically no. It's frustrating especially when its been made public that they'll help with the system, I feel let down."

Telford is not alone, hundreds of families across the province are facing similar issues.

Lack of broadband service is an issue in many rural and remote parts of the country. According to [the most recent statistics from the CRTC](#), 40.8 per cent of rural households had access to high-speed internet as of 2018. For some, such as Telford, when it is available, it's cost prohibitive.

Telford noted that she has been in contact quite often with their school principal but after getting nowhere, she decided to go directly to the Trillium Lakelands District School Board, TLDSB, with an email, explaining her situation but she never received a response.

According to Telford, she received a phone call from their school principal about 20 minutes after she sent the email out to TLDSB.

The school principal has offered to print off the school work for the children, Telford recently picked up the paperwork from the school and was again, let down.

"There is the odd thing in there that my kids are able to do but the majority of it is instructions to go to this website and watch this video before you can do the work," she said. " I almost wanted to throw it in the air Thursday, I felt like giving up."

The school also directed Telford to speak with the local Covid Relief Fund set up by local volunteers. She noted they have been very helpful and are currently working on the situation.

Kawartha411 reached out to TLDSB, but they declined to speak on the issue but provided us with a written statement.

According to Sinead Fegan, Communications Officer for TLDSB, the Board has been focusing on providing devices to students in need while remote learning is taking place.

"We have provided wifi sticks to some students, mainly focusing on secondary students so they can graduate. In saying that, due to equity and the availability of internet in some areas of the Board, we are providing the option of paper materials to these families that are having connectivity problems," she said in the statement.

Fegan also noted that if a family would like to make a request for either a device or paper materials, they are asked to reach out to their child's home school.

"Another option for parents/guardians are the recently announced government grants available to families in need with students over the age of 13, as well as under the age of 13 with special needs," she added.

The province however puts the blame on the school board. According to Caitlin Clark, Deputy Director of Communications for Education Minister Stephen Lecce, school boards are required to make provisions and adaptations for those students who are unable to learn remotely due to connectivity issues to ensure the continuity of learning.

"Our government has invested nearly 1 billion dollars to expand and improve broadband and cellular services right across the province, including in rural and remote areas, in addition to 15 million dollars for online learning devices," she said. "Just last week, we announced an upcoming

investment of an additional 80 million dollars for more devices, including those for connectivity. We will never hesitate from taking further action to support our students and keep them safe.”

The government says it also issued a remote learning policy in August 2020 to ensure that students across the province receive a consistent learning experience, she added.

“This policy requires school boards to work collaboratively with parents to ensure that all students have access to remote learning devices and the Internet during remote learning,” said Clark. “School boards are expected to provide remote learning devices and Internet connectivity to students who do not otherwise have access to them, and to develop policies on how these resources will be allocated on an equitable basis.”

According to Clark, in situations where students do not have access to remote learning devices or the Internet, and a school board is unable to provide this support, school boards should have a process in place to work collaboratively with students and parents to establish alternative arrangements on an individual basis.

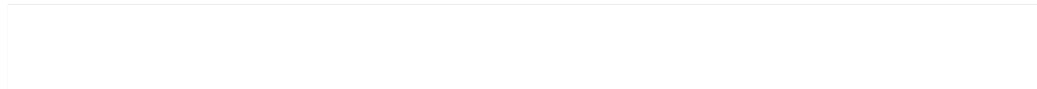
“To support meaningful access to education, alternative learning approaches must be put in place for all exempted students,” noted Clark.

Correspondence, print, or broadcast media instruction that is based on the individual student’s needs and circumstances are various options according to the province.

It has been made very clear to school boards, they’re required to make adaptations when necessary to make sure students are being educated properly, its been communicated clearly, stated Clark.

Meanwhile Telford and her children are stuck in the middle, with no help and no answers.

Names have been changed to protect the identity of the children.



Jennifer Walker

Jennifer decided to study journalism after having a life long passion for writing. She began her career as a reporter for the Uxbridge Times Journal and moved on to freelance work for various publications after her and her husband welcomed their daughters. She has been published in various Durham Region newspapers, the Durham Parent Magazine as well as Equine Wellness. Jennifer continues to follow her dreams as a wife, mother and journalist and is so excited to join the team at Kawartha411.