



NEWS

Working with multiple health units means back to school not for everyone

Area school boards continue to juggle online learning while awaiting word from province as to when all schools will reopen

By **Catherine Whitnall** Kawartha Lakes This Week

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Dealing with multiple health units and differing COVID-19 zones was challenging enough, but now local school boards are also navigating through the issue of having some students still learning virtually with the province choosing to not send everyone back to school Jan. 25.

“Certainly, it's an unusual situation,” said Peterborough Victoria Northumberland

and Clarington Catholic District School Board communications manager Galen Eagle. “I’m not sure if we’ve ever had a case where the majority of a board opened but schools remained closed.”

Although students in Peterborough, Northumberland and the City of Kawartha Lakes all returned to in-class studies, those in Clarington will continue learning virtually until at least Feb. 10.

“We’re looking forward to welcoming the staff and students back as soon as the province allows,” continued Eagle.

Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board chair Diane Lloyd said having some students in school, while others, who were not already learning virtually, remain at home is minor hurdle to address compared to the mental health impact.

“Unfortunately, nothing’s going to be perfect, but I’m sure our teachers and our parents will be able to handle it. Personally, I think it’s the constant changing that’s the bigger issue,” said Lloyd. “We know having students in school and learning is better than being isolated at home. So, while it’s an operational challenge for the board, we understand that parents and students have the bigger challenge.”

The return to school also looked a little different, as the province has expanded mandatory masking to all students, as well as requirements for masking outdoors when physical distancing is a challenge.

Both Eagle and Lloyd said this, so far, has not been an issue.

“Many of our (kindergarten to Grade 2) students have been wearing masks voluntarily since September,” said Eagle. “It just means it now needs to be enforced ... We’ll likely be seeing a lot more masks on playgrounds now, too.”

Trillium Lakelands District School Board – which has students in Muskoka Region who are still learning virtually – chose to mandate mask wearing for all students at the beginning of the year.