



May 12th, 2020

Dear Waterloo Catholic Community –

We hope that you found ways to enjoy the Mother's Day Weekend despite the less than spring-like weather and that fact that many of us were unable to celebrate in the more traditional ways that have characterized years past. It has been a few weeks since we have connected, so we thought it important to offer you a few important updates. As always, we sincerely hope that you and your families are well and that you are finding ways to stay healthy and positive. We want to commend our WCDSB community for the impactful and joyous ways we managed to still celebrate Catholic Education Week. Few of us could have predicted how appropriate or needed our theme of *Igniting Hope* would be. It was truly heartening to see the many videos, messages, artwork, pictures and reflections of hope in our schools and homes. Truly we believe we all feel the importance of our faith and our community at this time.

We are now settling into our journey of educator-led distance learning. We know that for some it will be going well and that for a variety of reasons, for others, it may still be a challenge. Our realities are each different and at Waterloo Catholic we are working hard to ensure the best possible experience for our students. You may recall the invitation we gave our stakeholders in the week of April 14th to 21st to engage in a *Thought Exchange* where you were invited to share your concerns and questions. We have now processed all that feedback and we would like to share with you what you said and how we would like to respond.

We are pleased to report that we had over 1900 respondents, 1700 thoughts and 37,000 ratings. We had a broad cross-section of voices and the number of respondents from each group was a good representation of that stakeholder group. Parents in general did reflect that they appreciate the efforts of their children's teachers and we could certainly not be prouder of the hard work of so many to connect our students with learning at this time. Elementary parents told us that they can be over-whelmed at times with balancing their own responsibilities and their children's learning, that sometimes they need better clarity on what is optional and that they would appreciate a better sense of routine. Perhaps most of all – they desire that connection between educator and home. Secondary parents are also looking for clear communication and want to remain involved in their child's learning. They would like to see the inclusion of synchronous ('Live') learning or video conferencing. And there remains a concern about their children's report cards and post-secondary impacts.

We would like to report that we have heard you. We continue to provide our teachers with further guidance and clarity about assessment, evaluation and reporting during this time of distance learning. We have also worked on staff communications that are intended to strengthen consistency and clarity of expectation, while also looking at ways to solidify our collaboration with one another as staff. We have heard you that a sense of routine is important and we will be working to reinforce that message. We are also providing further professional development on good practices connected to synchronous learning, which remains an option in a teacher's toolkit. No student should be adversely affected as a result of COVID-19 school closure and we are working hard to ensure that is the case. We know that equity issues matter to you and we are doing our best to bridge gaps, but providing resources and supports where they are needed to the best of our ability.



We are most appreciative to our staff who have worked so hard to put provisions in place so that we could reach all of our students. One common theme regardless of stakeholder group- was the desire for connection. We miss one another – and that is both heartening and normal. Schools are remarkable places where relationship and community are forged, and maintaining that strong sense of connection is hard work. We hope you will agree with us that our staff have certainly risen to the occasion and we know that each one has put their best foot forward in support of our students. The sense of care and the love for their students is evident. The physical, mental and spiritual well-being of our students remains our priority. That said – we will continue to prioritize this work and the strong sense of family that we have as the community of Waterloo Catholic.

[Thought Exchange Thoughts and Themes](#)

We know that further clarity about the length of the closure is likely to come later this week. Full clarity about our return or what that might look like when we do return, may still be a while in coming, but we are committed to sharing those details when we have them. We also know that seminal spring events such as communions, confirmations and graduations are currently being re-imagined. We are hopeful that we will be able to have fall convocations for our graduates. We know that you are missing the opportunity to celebrate this spring. There are some virtual and media events which will assist in the short-term. Communions will be re-scheduled in the fall, parish by parish, as we are able. Similarly, once we are able, more information will follow about confirmations, as we learn about the availability of the Bishop and/or Vicar, and balance that with the size of the confirmandee class. There is an intention to proceed, once we are able.

As always, on our WCDSB board website you will find from our home page a link to [WCDSBLearn@Home](#) where a host of additional resources for all learners will be found. We also encourage you to continue to visit our [WCDSBPray@Home](#) webpage as well as our [FAQ](#) page.

Finally – as we have said before, we do encourage you to closely follow any and all directives from our governments and Waterloo Region Public Health. As we have reflected before – we are apart but never closer. Let us commit to being there for one another. Reach out to us through your local school. While our Thought Exchange is done for now, we are still interested in hearing from you and walking with you. Please reach out to us if you need help or guidance, and remain confident that we are here to support you, as we walk together as a hope-filled community. *#WCDSBTogether*.

Sincerely,

Loretta Notten
Director of Education

Bill Conway
Chair of the Board

