



GOOD NEWS RELEASE

RCCDSB prepares safe schools for face-to-face learning this fall

Safety and well-being are the top priorities for the Renfrew County Catholic District School Board as staff and students get ready to return to in-person learning on September 7.

Following health and safety guidance from the Ministry of Education and working closely with the Renfrew County and District Health Unit, the RCCDSB is preparing schools and protocols in order to provide safe learning environments.

“As we look forward to the 2021-2022 school year, the safety of our school communities is top of mind,” stated Bob Schreder, RCCDSB Chair. “Extensive work is being done to ensure a safe and successful return to school for everyone.”

That includes close attention to air quality. Over the past year, combined federal-provincial funding has provided support for school boards to optimize and improve ventilation and/or filtration in schools. “With this funding, the RCCDSB is continuing its work to improve air flow and air quality in our classrooms,” noted Mark Searson, RCCDSB Director of Education.

Fifty percent of the RCCDSB’s 20 schools currently have full mechanical ventilation systems, all of which are equipped with higher-grade air filters. Another 20% of RCCDSB schools have partial mechanical ventilation.

Ventilation upgrades are scheduled for completion by September 1 at St. Michael’s Catholic School in Douglas, St. James Catholic School, Eganville, and St. John Bosco Catholic School, Barry’s Bay.

Ventilation improvement projects are also in progress at Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School, Renfrew, Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School, Pembroke, as well as both St. John XXIII Catholic School and St. Joseph’s Catholic School in Arnprior.

For any schools where projects will not be completed by September 1 or that don’t have mechanical ventilation, every occupied classroom will have a standalone High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filter unit(s) in place to improve air exchange.

Ongoing inspection and maintenance will take place throughout the year to ensure systems are in good working order, they will be run longer (before and after school hours) and filters will be replaced more frequently, noted Searson.

In addition, the Board has ordered 8 replacement portable classrooms that incorporate updated ventilation equipment and are scheduled for arrival in the Fall. Water bottle filling stations were added at Bishop Smith Catholic High, Pembroke and St. John XXIII, Arnprior. Other strategies for safe learning environments include outdoor education where possible and open classroom windows.

Window replacement has been ongoing at RCCDSB schools, with St. Mary's Our Lady of Good Council, Deep River, being completed the week of August 16th and George Vanier Catholic School in Combermere is scheduled for a Fall completion. The new double-glazed windows increase comfort, reduce energy consumption and open to allow fresh air into classrooms.

"We are blessed in that our schools are able to provide beautiful outdoor learning spaces and a majority of our classrooms have windows that can be opened when weather permits," said Searson. COVID-19 protocols in place this Fall will include daily screening, cohorts for elementary students, appropriate masking and physical distancing, hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette. Enhanced cleaning protocols and disinfection standards will continue in the Fall to help reduce the risk of infection.

In the classroom, emphasis will be placed on mental health and well-being, spiritual renewal and student reengagement, as well as closing learning loss gaps.

"COVID-19 has had a significant impact on education for the past two school years. While there may be some challenges ahead, we look forward to welcoming and supporting staff and students back to our safe school environments characterized by warmth, hospitality, good humour and joy," said Searson.

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