



## REPORT TO

## REGULAR BOARD

# TORONTO CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

*The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*

*Psalm 27*

Created, Draft	First Tabling	Review
April 10, 2020	April 23, 2020	<a href="#">Click here to enter a date.</a>

Rory McGuckin, Director of Education

Dan Koenig, Associate Director of Academic Affairs

Nick D'Avella – Superintendent of Equity, Diversity, Indigenous Education, and Community Relations

## INFORMATION REPORT

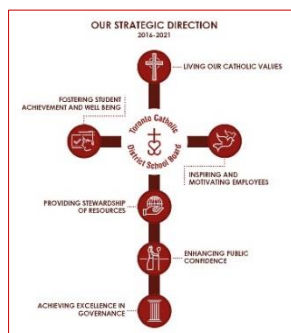
### Vision:

*At Toronto Catholic we transform the world through witness, faith, innovation and action.*

### Mission:

*The Toronto Catholic District School Board is an inclusive learning community uniting home, parish and school and rooted in the love of Christ.*

*We educate students to grow in grace and knowledge to lead lives of faith, hope and charity.*



Rory McGuckin  
Director of Education

D. Koenig  
Associate Director  
of Academic Affairs

L. Noronha  
Associate Director of Facilities,  
Business and Community  
Development, and  
Chief Financial Officer

## A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Toronto Catholic District School (TCDSB) struck its Pandemic Planning Committee in January to gather information, monitor and assess the then-emerging issues and challenges related to the evolving Coronavirus crisis.

On March 13, 2020, the provincial government ordered a closure of schools until April 4, 2020 as part of a larger social and physical distancing strategy to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. The government subsequently extended the school closure to May 4, 2020, and in an April 14 memorandum, further extended the closure to an unknown date.

To co-ordinate its response to the COVID-19 crisis, the TCSDSDB created the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) and two subcommittees: the Academic Emergency Response Team (AERT) and the Business Emergency Response Team (BERT). Aligned with and informed by the Ministry of Education's goals of ensuring continuity of learning and sustaining services, the three interconnected committees formed the Board's integrated decision-making structure.

The work of the EOC and its supporting teams has unfolded in two distinct phases.

### **PHASE 1**

***This is the period between March 13 and April 5. The work focused on:***

- ensuring continuity of faith development;
- gathering information and data to meet system needs related to access to technology for staff and students;
- identifying key mental health and nutrition supports for all TCDSB families and for underserved communities in particular;
- outlining *check-and-connect* protocols and expectations;
- establishing protocols for controlled access-to-schools by staff;
- ensuring adherence to Toronto Public Health (TPH) protocols in the closure of all TCDSB playgrounds, playing fields and sports amenities;
- ensuring critical repairs to facilities are carried out in accordance with government guidelines and TPH safety protocols;
- ensuring collaboration with unions and employee groups in the development of the TCDSB's distance learning plan;

- creating on-line professional learning opportunities and resources for staff in order to build efficacy in the implementation of teacher-led distance learning;
- identifying the essential curriculum for all divisions, grades, and courses;
- ensuring that assessment and evaluation are conducted in a fair, equitable manner in accordance with the principles outlined in *Growing Success*;
- ensuring that graduating students are not adversely impacted in their application to post-secondary institution; and
- ensuring timely communications with staff and stakeholders.

The work of Phase One culminated in the TCDSB's teacher-led distance learning action plan titled, "*A Faith Community of Believers: TCDSB's Distance Learning Implementation Plan*" (**Appendix A**). The plan was developed in consultation with union and employee groups. With its strong focus on equity of access to resources, this comprehensive framework comprises twelve key components designed to ensure teacher-led continuity of learning as well as the maintenance of a variety of essential supports for families.

Throughout Phase One, TCDSB's response was guided by Ministry Guidance Memoranda as well as critical information from the twice-weekly (Tuesdays and Thursdays) Ministry of Education's teleconferences with the directors of education. Information was shared with the EOC, the AERT, and the BERT in daily video conferencing meetings with senior staff, and in turn, with principals in meetings facilitated by field superintendents. Further, the TCDSB was particularly fortunate to have its Director sit as a member of the provincial Continuity of Learning Planning Table charged with advising the Minister on distance learning strategies and approaches.

## **PHASE 2**

***This phase began on April 6, 2020 and is on-going. It is defined by the implementation of the Teacher-led Distance Learning Plan***

The EOC, working in concert with AERT, BERT, and local school administrative staff will continuously monitor the implementation of teacher-led distance learning.

## **B. PURPOSE**

Focusing on the following key areas, this report provides a high-level summary update on key decisions, actions, and outcomes in the TCDSB's response to the COVID-19 crisis:

Report Component
1. Continuity of Religious Education and Faith Formation
2. Review of Committees and Key Decisions
3. Business Continuity Plan
4. A Faith Community of Believers: Distance Learning Implementation Plan
5. Access to Technology and Equity Plan to Provide Devices/Internet
6. Access to Schools/Worksites
7. Principal and Staff Meetings
8. Professional Learning Program for Teacher-Led Distance Learning
9. Continuity of Food/Nutrition Program
10. Commitment to Communication
11. Continuity of Special Education and Mental Health Supports

## **C. BACKGROUND**

The COVID-19 pandemic crisis presents unprecedented challenges for Ontario's Education System and for the TCDSB. With a commitment to sustaining faith development and an adherence to the principles of simplicity, flexibility, compassion, and equity the TCDSB has worked diligently to create and implement a distance learning plan that will ensure continuity of learning for its 90,000 students. The overarching challenge has been transitioning from a face-to-face education system to a virtual, teacher-led distance learning mode of curriculum delivery and assessment.

## D. EVIDENCE/RESEARCH/ANALYSIS

### Continuity of Religious Education and Faith Formation

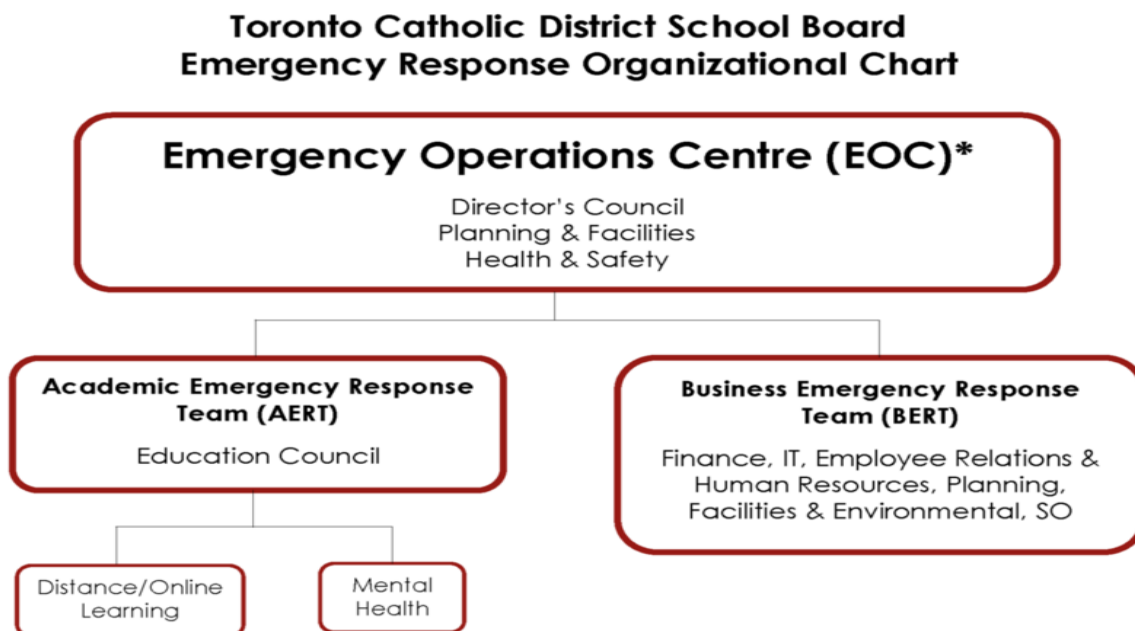
1. The TCDSB, through the Nurturing Our Catholic Community (NCC) Team, will continue to provide information, curriculum resources, opportunities for worship, faith formation, and faith animation as well as pastoral care supports throughout Phase Two; teacher-led distance learning.
2. The NCC has created a Newsletter, *Nurturing Our Families of Faith*, for staff, students and families, highlighting opportunities for worship through prayer and reflections throughout the liturgical seasons.
3. The NCC, System Chaplaincy, Religious and Family Life Education, and the Catholic Student Leadership Team will ensure timely system communications to all stakeholders to provide information on a variety of initiatives and supports.
4. Guidelines for secondary school chaplains have been developed to support their work in the virtual learning environment.
5. On March 23, 2020, elementary and secondary religious education curriculum resources were provided to support parents and students in the virtual learning environment.
6. In consultation with school boards within the Archdiocese of Toronto, dedicated time, a minimum of 1 hour per week, for Religious and Family Life education has been established for the duration of Phase Two, teacher led-distance learning.
7. There has been an affirmation that all aspects of curriculum are viewed through the lens of faith ensuring that a distinctively Catholic worldview and a faith perspective continue to permeate learning materials and reflect the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations. (Addressed in *A Faith Community of Believers: TCDSB's Distance Learning Implementation Plan*.)
8. Religious Education and faith formation in the virtual learning environment are supported through the provision of sample cross-curricular lessons and daily learning activities that include the Catholic lens.

9. Throughout the distance learning phase, daily reflections and prayers for staff students, and parents are available on the TCDSB Website (NCC homepage).
10. Starting on March 27 weekly liturgies have been broadcasted on-line for all TCDSB stakeholders. On-line broadcasts will continue for the duration of the closure.
11. Student leaders will support faith formation through their bi-weekly “Let’s Talk Faith” broadcasts.

## Review of Committees and Key Decisions

The TCDSB created a three-part decision-making structure consisting of the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) and two subcommittees: the Academic Emergency Response Team (AERT) and the Business Emergency Response Team (BERT). Cross representation on these committees ensured for the free flow of information so that timely, informed, and fully integrated decisions could be made.

The following chart outlines the constitution of TCDSB’s Emergency Response Committees/Teams and illustrates their interrelationship:



\*EOC was initiated as Phase 2 of the Pandemic Planning Committee, following the declaration of COVID-19 pandemic.



1. Working in concert with one another, these committees convened at least twice weekly with the AERT meeting daily during Phase One as it worked to develop the TCDSB's teacher-led distance learning plan.
2. Between March 19, 2020 and April 9, 2020 COVID-19 response committees undertook to address a broad range of issues, decisions, and actions related to the TCDSB's response to the COVID-19 crisis. These include:
  - i. Supporting the consolidation Board meetings to two a month and the implementation of virtual SEAC meetings;
  - ii. the closure of TCDSB playgrounds and sports field in accordance with Toronto Public Health (TPH) directions;
  - iii. the creation of signage for playgrounds and sports fields to inform of closure;
  - iv. the remuneration of occasional and casual staff during the school closure using an average earning formula;
  - v. the cancellation of April and May excursions and events;
  - vi. the central vetting of all system communications by the Communications Department;
  - vii. the development of an access to schools, the CEC and other TCDSB buildings with protocols designed to ensure safety and mitigate coronavirus transmission;
  - viii. the approval for the plan to purchase the appropriate devices for student use during the closure.
  - ix. the formation of communications to stakeholders and staff on Phase Two, the implementation of the TCDSB's teacher-led distance learning plan;
  - x. the approval of deferral of lease payments; and
  - xi. the approval of virtual budget consultation meetings with stakeholders (staff, CSPCs, OAPCE, and CPIC).
3. Additional details on key decisions, actions, dates, and outcomes related to TCDSB COVID-29 response committees are provided in **Appendix B**.



## **Business Continuity Plan**

1. To ensure the continuity of the essential business of the organization, the TCDSB has developed a Business Continuity Plan.
2. Developed between March 31, 2020 and April 1, 2020 the plan comprises fifteen key business functions including:
  - i. the continuity of payroll to ensure all staff, except daily occasional staff, are paid in accordance with Ministry and Revenue Canada statutes and regulations;
  - ii. the continuation of procurement activities on-line;
  - iii. the continuation of accounting activities on-line resulting in the completion and remote external auditing of Ministry of Education March 31 reporting procedures, paperless transaction processing, and remote access to on-line banking by principals and school secretaries;
  - iv. the continuation of Budget Activities with the issuance of the Budget Consultation Survey and adherence to Ministry of Education deadlines;
  - v. an increase in Service Desk requirements to support the organizations movement to remote operations;
  - vi. the management of the IT infrastructure to support the organization's movement to remote operations;
  - vii. the management of IT systems resulting in the normal operations of SAP, SIS, etc. and facilitating check and connect through the creation of class lists and remote access to data for teachers;
  - viii. a review of all renewal project for urgency and health and safety;
  - ix. a review of all capital projects through on-line meetings to access impact resulting from the non-essential construction order;
  - x. the movement of Planning, Admissions, and Registration to on-line mode, resulting in the placement of Priorities 1 and 2 elementary students and the clearing of wait lists for September 2020;
  - xi. a real estate review, resulting in the deferral of all rental payments for tenants impacted by closures;
  - xii. the cancellation of school permits and an increase in the daily refund threshold to better manage the influx of refund requests;



- xiii. a plan for Transportation to remain on “standby” with provisions for deep cleaning of bus and for drivers to be paid 100% to ensure buses will be ready to resume when schools reopen;
  - xiv. the limited deployment of custodial services on a rotational schedule to conduct walkthrough to ensure grounds are free of debris; and
  - xv. the continuation of limited maintenance services with a focus on ensuring site security and maintenance of critical operations and infrastructures.
3. Additional details on key decisions, actions, dates, and outcomes related to the Business Continuity Plan are provided in **Appendix C**.

## **A Faith Community of Believers: TCDSB’s Distance Learning Implementation Plan**

1. Titled *A Faith Community of Believers: TCDSB’s Distance Learning Implementation Plan*, (Appendix A) was developed in consultation with principals and vice-principals as well as our union partners and other employee groups.
2. As an evolving document, the plan includes direction for Designated Early Childhood Educators (DECEs) and additional information related to Special Services and support for students with special education.
3. The plan was shared on April 3<sup>rd</sup> with CPIC, CSPC, SEAC, Trustees, Ed Council, Principals, VPs and all teachers (Elementary, Secondary and Occasional).
4. Underpinned by Nurturing Our Catholic Community, the framework outlines ten key areas of focus:
  - i. Teacher-Led Distance Learning,
  - ii. Support for Families in Need,
  - iii. Assessment,
  - iv. The Role of School-Based Educational Support Staff,
  - v. Supporting Students with Special Needs,
  - vi. Addressing the Mental Health and Well Being of Students and Staff,
  - vii. Protocols for Distance Learning for Staff and Students,

- viii. Providing Access to Technology for Staff,
- ix. Supports for our English as Second Language Students, and
- x. Professional Learning for Implementing Distance Learning for Staff.

## **Access to Technology and Equity Plan to Provide Devices/Internet**

1. Access to devices and internet service is essential in order for all students to participate fully in teacher-led distance learning and ensure equity of learning outcomes.
2. Recognizing the necessity to support our most vulnerable families, the TCDSB undertook a technology needs assessment.
3. On March 27, parents/guardians of TCDSB students received a request to complete a survey (*TCDSB Parent Consultation – Access to Technology*, with the link <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/TCDSB-Home-Technology>) regarding technological devices and internet access at home. The aim of this survey was to identify needs within the community to support students in Phase Two of the Teacher-led Distance Learning initiative.
4. Families without devices/internet access were contacted by phone by school staff. A custom student needs app was developed to facilitate contact with each student and assess technology needs.
5. To date the TCDSB has leased 3,000 iPads with LTE service and 3,000 Chromebooks for students who have internet access but do not have a device.
6. On April 14, the process of configuring and shipping devices directly to families and students was started.
7. Teachers who required devices were provided with Cloudbooks from school inventories and supported through IT services.

## **Access to Schools/Worksites**

1. The TCDSB recognized the necessity for access to schools and worksites. In response, protocols were created for the controlled access to schools and worksites.
2. Detailed Protocols were developed by the Academic Emergency Response Team (AERT) and the Business Emergency Response Team (Bert) to ensure the highest possible degree of safety during access to schools and worksite. These protocols were shared with principals and vice-principals, and Facilities personnel.
3. Access to school and worksite protocols were developed with adherence to TPH COVID-19 restrictions and guidelines.
4. On April 2, 2020, principals and vice-principals along with custodial staff accessed schools to prepare devices for pick-up.
5. On April 3, 2020, principals and vice-principals accessed schools to provide devices to teachers, Designated Early Childhood Educators, International Language Instructors, and parents of students with SEA claims. Child care providers were able to retrieve critical documents.
6. On April 7, 2020, principals and vice-principals entered schools to prepare for the pick-up of SEA claim devices and critical items for staff.
7. On April 8, 2020, administrators accessed schools to distribute devices and critical items to teachers, Designated Early Childhood Educators, International Language Instructors, and parents of students with SEA claims.
8. On April 17, 2020, administrators will have access to schools to locate a variety of critical items from a prescribed list and prepare them for pick-up on Monday, April 20, 2020.

## **Principal and Staff Meetings**

1. Throughout Phase One (March 13 to April 5), regular, often daily, virtual principals' meetings, facilitated by field superintendents, ensured principals received timely information and direction with which to lead and engage

teachers and support staff in the implementation of TCDSB's learning continuity plans.

2. Principals' meetings offered school leaders the opportunity to provide input on the development and implementation of the distance learning plan.
3. Key items in principal and staff meetings include:
  - i. the posting and sharing of information from the Ministry of Education to support students and parents in Phase One;
  - ii. the sharing of "Learn at Home" resources with staff
  - iii. the sharing of information and the gathering of input for the implementation of Phase Two: teacher-led distance learning;
  - iv. the sharing of information on strategies and staff expectations for Phase One "check and connect";
  - v. a discussion on a strategy for administrators to check and connect with staff to provide supports as required;
  - vi. a discussion on a strategy for a checking and connecting with vulnerable families in need of supports;
  - vii. the sharing of communications on the cancellation of excursions and events in April and May;
  - viii. the sharing of information and resources for the self-care of our administrators;
  - ix. a discussion and sharing of information on a video conferencing platform for principal and staff meetings;
  - x. a discussion on system readiness and identification of barriers for the implementation of Phase Two; teacher-led distance learning;
  - xi. the provision of principal professional development in preparation for the implementation of distance learning;
  - xii. a discussion outlining the roles of and expectations for support staff;
  - xiii. a discussion to gather input on the parent survey to assess the devices and internet needs of families;
  - xiv. a discussion on copyright and privacy-related issues in the distance learning environment;
  - xv. the sharing of information on TCDSB centrally-prepared resources and activities to support students during the Ministry of Education's "Learn at Home" phase;

- xvi. a discussion on staffing process and timelines in compliance with collective agreements;
  - xvii. a discussion to gather input on the TCDSB's distance learning plan;
  - xviii. a discussion on the use of a Board-approved video conferencing platform for staff meetings;
  - xix. the outlining of processes and protocols for controlled access to schools to retrieve critical learning materials, essential technology for staff, and Special Education Assistive (SEA) for students;
  - xx. a discussion on the use of equity funds and field superintendents' equity reserve funds for the food and nutrition supports of families in need; and
  - xxi. the sharing of information on accessing translation and interpreter services to support families during the closure.
4. Additional details on key decisions, actions, dates, and outcomes related to Principal and Staff Meeting are provided in **Appendix D**.

## **Professional Learning Program for Teacher-led Distance Learning**

1. The TCDSB recognizes the critical importance of professional learning to build administrator and teacher efficacy in the implementation of the teacher-led distance learning.
2. Professional learning opportunities for staff were launched on March 30th, with further learning opportunities announced on April 2<sup>nd</sup> and on an on-going basis thereafter to assist with additional support in understanding virtual learning environment for the implementation of distance learning during Phase 2 (beginning April 6);
3. These professional learning opportunities are offered from both the Ministry and TCDSB.
4. A variety of Ministry of Education Webinars is available at various times.
5. Among the professional learning topics addressed by TCDSB are Working from Home: Privacy & Information Security and Choosing a Digital Learning Platform - D2L (VLE) and Google Classroom.

6. To support professional learning, the Curriculum and Student Success Departments have created a site containing dedicated resources on the effective use of TCDSB-supported on-line learning platforms.
7. All staff are advised of all professional learning opportunities and resources via regular emails from the Curriculum Leadership & Innovation; and Academic Information & Communications Technology Department, and the Student Success Department.

## **Continuity of Food/Nutrition Program**

1. On March 26, the Angel Foundation for Learning (AFL) announced the launch of a student home nutrition initiative – FOOD FOR KIDS!
2. Before the school closure, TCDSB had Student Nutrition Programs (SNPs), supporting 60,000 students in 167 schools (serving over 1.2 million meals per month).
3. AFL secured approval from the Toronto Foundation for Student Success (TFSS), Toronto Public Health (TPH) and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) for the reallocation of funds from the Student Nutrition Program (offered in schools) to support a home nutrition program (FOOD FOR KIDS!)
4. AFL, in collaboration with the Superintendent of Equity, Diversity, Indigenous and Community Relations and supported by the TCDSB Equity-Poverty Action Networks (E-PAN), in distributing food cards (\$50 per student per family) to the neediest students and families in the TCDSB community during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
5. To date, the AFL's FOOD FOR KIDS program has been launched in 4 phases making approximately 15,464, \$50.00-grocery gift cards available to families in 27 schools.
6. Further, food and nutrition supports are provide through the equity fund and the superintendents' equity reserve fund.

## **Commitment to Communication**

1. Clear and timely communications have been central to TCDSB's response to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Using all available tools, the Communications department has efficiently and effectively managed communications to all stakeholders amidst evolving and fluid development during the pandemic crisis.
2. Since January, approximately 40 communications have been sent to various stakeholders from the Director, the Associate Director of Academic Affairs and the Superintendent of Human Resources.
3. Communication topics have included COVID-19 information updates, Toronto Public Health notices, learning resources, government announcements, and FAQs.
4. Following AERT and BERT meetings, the Communications Department has sent numerous emails informing the system on such topics as access to learning resources, technology, access to schools, staff supports, and compensations.
5. The TCDSB Website is monitored and regularly updated. It features a dedicated COVID-19 page.
6. On an on-going basis, daily social media content is created to ensure timely access to information including links, key documents, and resources.
7. The Weekly Wrap-up for "Everyone on Exchange" features key COVID-19 updates, staff resources, learning resources for students, information on mental health supports, and a summary of key information for staff, students and families.
8. Weekly Briefing Notes for Trustees have been prepared by the Chief of Communications containing: information on Ministry teleconference with CODE, development from the provincial Learning Continuity Table, updates on TCDSB system responses to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, and a summary of outgoing communications.



## **Continuity of Special Education and Mental Health Supports**

1. Special Services Central Staff from the various disciplines have been collaborating with Central Curriculum Staff members of the Curriculum Sub-Committee in order to provide teaching and learning accommodations for the daily and weekly online lesson plan suggestions being provided to elementary and secondary teachers.
2. Special Services central staff providing this form of support have included the following: Student Support Response Team (Behaviour) Teachers; Speech and Language Pathologists; Deaf/Hard of Hearing Itinerant Teachers; Autism Support Teachers; Blind/Low Vision Teachers and Orientation/Mobility Specialist Teachers; Care and Treatment (CTCC) Program Teachers; Assistive Technology Teachers (AT Team); Assessment and Programming Teachers (APTs - Elementary); Programming and Assessment Teachers (PATs – Secondary); and a variety of Support Staff including: Child and Youth Workers, Education Assistants (and other classifications of Support Staff who are normally assigned to support students with a variety of Special Education needs).
3. As we continue to progress along the Distance Learning phase continuum, Special Services teaching and support staff will provide assistance to school-based teaching staff with the assessment and evaluation phases of learning.
4. Subject-based, Special Education focused learning materials are provided both on the Sharepoint subject-based resources site for TCDSB educators as well as the public-facing website for parents and students. Those resources are updated regularly.
5. Mental Health supports have been provided to students and families, through the Principal and the School Based Support Learning Team (SBSLT) from the outset of the Learn at Home phase.
6. Check and Connect services as well as more intense counselling or advisory services have been provided to students and families by the following Special Services staff: Psychologists, Social Workers, and Mental Health Professional Workers using an appropriate medium of communication that protects privacy. Alerts made to the appropriate

- school service provider continue to be initiated via the School Based Support Learning Team (SBSLT) to address non-academic, social-emotional student needs that have emerged during the Check and Connect and Check, Connect, and Learning phases of student/family interactions.
7. The TCDSB, School Mental Health Ontario (SMHO), Centre for Child Protection Mental Health resources for TCDSB staff can be located on the Mental Health Sharepoint site; and for parents/students can be easily located on the public-facing website.
  8. Any social-emotional concerns of an emergency nature that have arisen during the Check and Connect or Check, Connect, and Learn phases are referred to 9-1-1 or other appropriate community agency supports as per the regular Board protocols.

## **E. METRICS AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

1. Using research-based practices, the aim of monitoring is to support, validate, mentor and nurture staff through the distance learning phase.
2. The senior team and school administrators will lead and learn in the virtual environment by:
  - a. checking and connecting with staff to provide professional supports validation, and affirmation of efforts;
  - b. continuing to listen and address issues and challenges articulated by staff;
  - c. supporting professional learning for improved efficacy;
  - d. providing support for mental health and well-being;
  - e. leading with an equity frame of reference; and
  - f. leading with calm, compassion, and empathy.

## **F. CONCLUDING STATEMENT**

This report is for the consideration of the Board.