



Alana Murray, *Director of Education*

# Bluewater District School Board

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March 24, 2020

Dear Students, Parents/Guardians, and Staff:

These are unprecedented times. Today, medical professionals announced that 44 percent of all COVID-19 cases are being contracted through community contact. The containment strategies are now more important than ever. We must work together by:

- Staying at home as per the provincial and federal requests
- Avoiding gatherings
- Practicing adequate physical distancing
- Washing your hands for 15-20 seconds with soap and using hand sanitizer
- Coughing or sneezing into your arm
- If you have any symptoms, self-monitoring and self-isolating, and contacting a health care professional if symptoms persist
- If you have travelled outside Canada recently, ensuring you self-isolate for 14 days

I have received several messages from members of our Bluewater District School Board school communities expressing concern about limited access to internet or equipment in response to the Ministry of Education's commitment to ensure the continuity of learning for our students. We have identified this issue as a real concern for families living in rural Ontario, and Bruce and Grey counties specifically. Although millions of dollars have been invested in our communities for the expansion of broadband services, there are still many families, including our students and staff, who do not have reliable internet service. I urge you to not worry about this. This is the time to focus on our health and the health of our fellow citizens in Canada.

All non-essential businesses are being shut down today, which means families are worried about their financial security, in addition to the health concerns they have. Staff and parents are working from home trying to manage childcare, children's worries, concern for aging parents, uncertainty around how long this will last, economic impacts on their savings, and so on. We are not going to add to your worries. We are not going to ask you to take on the role of teacher, in addition to everything else you are trying to manage. School boards have been asked by the Ministry of Education to take the next two weeks to think through these issues and impacts, and determine what we can and cannot do to support our students. We are gathering resources to share with families and asking teachers to review their students' progress and programming. Nothing more is required at this time.

This is the time to focus on student, family, and staff well-being. Take time to read a book, watch a funny movie, go outside, and breathe in the clean Bruce/Grey county air. This is not the time to worry about graduation (students progressing towards graduation WILL graduate) or math homework. The Ministry of Education is speaking with post-secondary institutions, and I am confident they will adjust entrance requirements for this year's graduating class. Our potential graduates are part of a global group of students who are in the exact same place, and post-secondary institutions want and need first-year students. Literacy and math are important, and we will get to addressing them in due time.

Yesterday, Premier Ford announced that students will not be returning to school on April 6. I assure you that we are developing a plan for student learning beyond the next two weeks that will be balanced to meet the needs of families, as inclusive and varied as possible, and **optional**.

Directors of Education across Ontario are speaking together and with Ministry of Education officials two or three times a week, and are sharing concerns and possible solutions. **We have your backs!**

I am committed to communicating regularly with staff and families during these extraordinary circumstances. For more information, please see the following:

Bluewater District School Board: [http://www.bwdsb.on.ca/Parents/COVID-19\\_Updates](http://www.bwdsb.on.ca/Parents/COVID-19_Updates)

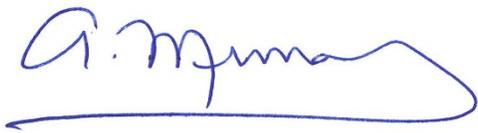
Grey Bruce Health Unit: <https://www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca>

Province of Ontario: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus>

Health Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html>

World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. Murray', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Alana J. Murray  
Director of Education