



Gledhill School Council

August 3, 2020

Dear Trustee Aarts,
Director of Education Jackson,
Superintendent Persaud,
Principal McAleese,
Vice-Principal Bambrick:
cc MPP Berns-McGown

We are writing as the **Gledhill School Council** on behalf of parents, guardians and children attending **Gledhill Junior Public School** to express our grave concerns regarding the recently-announced Ministry of Education directives for school reopening and the subsequent Toronto District School Board guidelines that will be discussed and voted on by the Toronto District School Board Committee of the Whole at a special meeting on August 4, 2020.

Our top priority is the **health and safety of our children, as well as that of our teachers, staff, and their families**. We are committed to working with you to implement measures that will increase safety at Gledhill Junior Public School while ensuring that our children's learning experience and socio-emotional well-being are prioritized. At the same time, we require that you take concrete action to make a safe reopening possible.

Requested Actions

In particular, and in solidarity with the **Parent Council of Secord Elementary School**, we are requesting that Trustee Aarts (and any other Trustee who receives this letter) introduce and/or amend and vote at the August 4, 2020, and subsequent meetings of the TDSB and/or its Committees for such motions as are required to have:

- 1. Mandatory face coverings** - Make face coverings mandatory, not voluntary, for *all* students who do not have a medical exemption, including those in JK, SK, and grades 1, 2 and 3 and to provide free N-95 or equivalent masks to students for whom such protection is or may be medically indicated.
- 2. Classes of 15 or fewer students; physical distance of at least 2m** - Mandate that all indoor classrooms be operated with a maximum of 15 students, or such number of students as required to make it practical to maintain a consistent minimum physical distance of 2m between people (students and staff) in classrooms. Wherever possible, floor markings should be provided in hallways and classrooms to facilitate appropriate distancing.
- 3. Adequate ventilation** - Mandate that all indoor classrooms or other indoor spaces to be used by students shall be adequately ventilated, including, at minimum, windows that

open and appropriate mechanical ventilation and air filtration, and **allocate such funds and time as required** to accomplish this.

4. **Creative use of available indoor and outdoor space** - Mandate that if student numbers in any class exceed 15 or such number of students as required to make it practical to maintain a consistent minimum physical distance of 2m between people (students and staff) in a given classroom, that class shall be held either outdoors or in an indoor space (such as a gymnasium within the school itself or in another facility) sufficiently large and well-ventilated to render it practical to maintain a consistent minimum physical distance of 2m.
5. **Properly equip outdoor classrooms** - Allocate such funds as are required to equip outdoor classrooms for all classes that cannot be accommodated indoors in accordance with the above restrictions.
6. **PPE for every person inside TDSB schools** - Mandate and allocate such funding as is necessary to ensure that every teacher, educational assistant, administrative staff member, supply teacher and other persons present in TDSB schools but not specifically named in the directives shall have access to personal protective equipment to a standard with which they are satisfied.
7. **Repaired, upgraded and sanitary washroom facilities** - Mandate and allocate such funding as reasonably required to ensure that every classroom/cohort has access to proper, sanitary washroom facilities, and that existing facilities (including toilets, sinks, and soap dispensers) are repaired, upgraded and regularly maintained to full operational status quickly and at all times. Children and staff should not be using washrooms that lack functioning toilets, sinks, and soap. Additionally, sending children and staff into classrooms other than their own to use washrooms due to out-of-service general facilities (i.e. into kindergarten classrooms with dedicated washrooms) must cease, as this increases the risk of exposure.
8. **Accessible, sanitary hand washing facilities** - Mandate and allocate such funding as is reasonably required to ensure that every classroom and washroom be equipped with a touchless hand washing station, soap and paper towel, and that alcohol-based hand sanitizer is readily available to students, teachers, and staff throughout the school and in the school yard.
9. **Water bottle filling stations** - Mandate that water bottle filling stations replace water fountains throughout the school.
10. **Elastic entry and exit between in-class and online learning environments** - Guarantee and allocate such funding as necessary to ensure that students whose parents have opted to enroll them in remote learning are permitted and able to return to in-class learning on demand, and to ensure that students whose parents initially elect in-class learning are permitted and able to in return switch to remote learning on demand. To this end, and to maintain social connections among students, the Board should, wherever practical, permit remote learning students, self-isolating students or students who for any other reason are temporarily uncomfortable attending in person to participate in virtual activities that connect them to the school community.
11. **A funded school nutrition program** - Mandate and allocate such funding to ensure that the TDSB provide the same level of nutrition to Gledhill Junior Public School students as would otherwise have been available to students enrolled in or eligible for snack programs, breakfast programs and other similar nutritional support programs.
12. **Synchronous learning** - Additionally, the parents of Gledhill Junior Public School would like to see the Board mandate and allocate such funding to ensure that every teacher has the technology and training available for synchronistic learning. Synchronous learning offered should be uniform, equitable and heavily supported. The approach needs to be clearly outlined and communicated to parents and guardians well in

advance of the beginning of the school year so that families can make the appropriate choices for their children. Those who choose this option should receive the same quality instruction and support for their children as those who choose to attend in-person classes. Allocate funds to ensure that all students can access remote and synchronistic learning.

- 13. Delayed re-opening until the above measures can be provide** - Providing that, should it not be practical within the remaining time to prepare for safe reopening in accordance with Public Health guidance and also in accordance with the above criteria, the reopening of TDSB schools should be delayed to such a date as necessary to make it practical.

Separately, we are requesting that Trustee Aarts and other Trustees who receive this letter initiate a motion, resolution, amendment, or such other such measure to bring about a formal declaration by the Toronto District School Board that **the amount of funding allocated by the Ministry of Education is inadequate to permit safe resumption of classes, and that safe resumption will require the funding indicated under Model 1A, Option 2 in the document entitled Returning To School: Planning Ahead for September 2020 presented to Trustees on July 15, 2020.**

Reasons for some of the above measures are articulated in greater detail below:

1. Following evidence-based public health directives:

- a. Addressing Structural Deficiencies: The *Updated COVID-19: Guidance for Reopening* report released by The Hospital for Sick Children on July 29, 2020, states that “[a]ddressing structural deficiencies, such as large class sizes, small classrooms and poor ventilation, must be part of any plan to reopen schools.”
- b. **Face Coverings:** Unfortunately, the [Ministry of Education guidelines](#) do not align with current best available scientific evidence and public health directives, which clearly state that in order to minimize spread, [people over the age of 2 should wear face coverings wherever it is not possible to ensure consistent distancing of 2m](#). We are requesting that the TDSB Committee of the Whole takes a principled stance and makes an official statement at the August 4, 2020, meeting that states that the Ministry’s guidelines and funding commitment do not allow for TDSB schools to follow public health guidelines.
- c. **Distancing:** The Ministry of Education’s policy on returning to school claims to draw on the expertise found in the report [COVID-19: Guidance for School Re-Opening \(July 29, 2020\) by SickKids](#). However, only select information is used and, at times, the Ministry’s advice contradicts the document. For example, [data cited in the Sick Kids report](#) notes that a distance of less than 2m may be acceptable only if students are asymptomatic AND wearing a face covering. We note that reference to the requirement of face coverings was left out of the Sick Kids report but is in the cited document. The [data included in the Sick Kids report](#) also states that 1m provides some protection but the study cited clearly recommends 2m distancing be universally accepted based on their meta-analysis. Ultimately, Sick Kids did recommend to the Ministry of Education that class sizes be capped at 15 students, advice that the Ministry ignored at the elementary school level.

d. **Ventilation:** Study after study shows [good ventilation](#) is critical for minimizing COVID-19 cases. Classrooms which are to be used **need to have good ventilation systems in place**. This might mean keeping doors open, installing fans and air purifiers, and making sure windows can open fully and safely. We reiterate our request for holding classes outdoors as much as possible and securing space within the community center for large classes which cannot distance by 2m. Although rigorous cleaning protocol of surfaces will be necessary, we need to acknowledge the most important mode of transmission for COVID-19 is through the air and thus invest in reducing airborne risk of transmission.

2. Moving between in-class learning and remote learning:

- a. Parents are feeling immense pressure to decide within the next couple of weeks whether they will physically be sending their children to school for in-class learning or opt for remote online learning. As the Ministry's guidelines do not adhere to public health advice, many parents are reluctantly leaning towards remote learning. Families with immunocompromised members feel they do not have any choice but to opt for remote learning. One parent whose child has severe asthma said: "online remote learning did not work for my child in the Spring but because my child is immunocompromised, I cannot send her to school under the current plan. I feel like I'm being forced to choose between my child's health and education".
- b. We are requesting that if parents opt for remote learning they be permitted to return to in-class learning if and when they choose. Additionally, every effort must be made to connect students learning remotely to their school community and provide supplementary learning material that does not require use of a digital device (books, worksheets, paper materials, etc).

3. Prioritizing the School Nutrition Program at Gledhill Junior Public School:

The school's breakfast program is a lifeline for many Gledhill students and their families. Many students rely on this program, and the school's closure has had a serious negative impact on their ability to meet their nutrition needs. We are requesting that as a priority the TDSB and school administration work with parents to **devise the safe and hygienic delivery of a school nutrition program** so that it can be implemented as soon as school begins. Both students learning in-schools and those learning remotely must be offered access to the program.

Request for Clear and Timely Communication Between School and Families

Communication between the school, Trustee and the Gledhill Junior Public School community is of utmost importance once school reopens. We are requesting that the **school consider avenues to quickly disseminate important information** (e.g. Twitter, rapid emails, robocalls) and to ensure written communications are clear, concise, accessible and highlight important issues in the subject heading. A clear communication plan should also be developed for parents of children with special needs and adults requiring language support.

Some items that would benefit from detailed clear communication as soon as possible include:

- How will physical distancing be managed at school start and end times? How will late students be processed?
- What will cohorts look like? What will happen with PhysEd, Music and other teachers who would usually be moving between cohorts?
- What will the process be if someone in a cohort shows symptoms? What will the process be if someone in a cohort tests positive?
- What will happen for lunch time? At recess?
- What kind of cleaning protocols will be implemented?
- How will screening be done?
- Will there be assemblies of any sort?
- Will non-personnel be allowed in the building? If so, under what stipulations?
- There are both Daycare and City of Toronto programs that happen within our school building. What is the interplay between these three groupings? Will these other programs continue to share space with Gledhill students? If so, what are the processes and protocols in place to ensure the safety of all children in shared spaces?
- How will the safety of students requiring additional support and students from racialized backgrounds ([known to have higher COVID related risks](#)) be prioritized?

These details need to be addressed and communicated as soon as possible so that families can make appropriate choices and arrangements for their children as needed.

Implementation of Challenging Logistics and Delayed School Reopening

Given the extremely short timelines and extensive planning, procurement and implementation necessary to ensure schools are as safe as possible when they reopen, we are requesting that the **TDSB explore the option of a delayed school reopening by 2-3 weeks**. We should not be rushing to open schools on September 8, 2020, if all safety equipment and protocols are not in place. We have heard time and time again from our teachers that three PA days scheduled at the beginning of September are not nearly enough time for safety training and to figure out how to deliver the curriculum with new restrictions in place. Families and students have waited this long and we would rather school reopened later in September, knowing safety equipment and protocol are in place, teachers and staff are well prepared and proper details on what to expect when students return to school has been communicated to families.

We are prepared to work closely with you to support the requests highlighted throughout this letter. As our elected representative, it is important that Trustee Aarts relays our concerns and requests at the August 4, 2020, Committee of the Whole meeting and we ask that she moves a motion to ensure our requests be met. We thank you for your hard work and dedication during this extremely stressful and unprecedented time. We know that the only way we will keep our students, staff and their families safe and their well-being prioritized is by working in partnership to solve logistical hurdles and think of creative solutions to a safe reopening. We unequivocally know that we can not ignore what science and experiences from other jurisdictions are telling us about how COVID-19 spreads. We must do whatever it takes to minimize the risk of COVID-19 spreading in our school and community while keeping the love of school and joy of learning alive and well at Gledhill Junior Public School.

Sincerely,

Gledhill School Council Executive Committee