

29 August 2016

Welcome Back!

One of the first signs of the beginning of a new school year is department stores with aisles overflowing with school supplies. Even with a 13 year old, my task is to distinguish between what he says he needs and what he simply wants. Not easy for any parent! For those of you who would like some support in having that discussion with your child, let me reassure you that our schools provide most of the required learning materials. If you need more information, this [link](#) will help you out.

Across the District, staff has been busy getting our schools and classrooms ready for Tuesday, September 6th. Over the summer, we registered children at our board office, giving parents this option in addition to registration at the neighbourhood school. By mid-August, we had registered 536 new students, an increase over last summer.

We have the potential for some big changes in our school district this year. In some parts of the school district, there is a need for new pupil places and we are delighted to be opening three new elementary schools as well as completing two significant rebuilds/renovations. In Orleans, some of the children from Avalon Public School will be moving to their new location at [Summerside Public School](#) (JK to 8 EFI; 7/8 English). In Barrhaven, [Half Moon Bay Public School](#) (JK to 6 EFI/English) will receive children from Barrhaven Public School and Jockvale Elementary School. In Kanata, [Kanata Highlands Public School](#) (JK to 6 EFI) will receive children from communities currently served by Jack Donohue, Stephen Leacock and Roland Michener public schools. [Broadview Public School](#) will move next door to their rebuilt school. And finally Devonshire Public School students will move into their renovated school.

In other parts of the school district, we have too many pupil spaces. Over the next five years, we will be doing [accommodation reviews](#) in many areas to ensure that we have just the right number of pupil spaces in our schools.

Why is this important for student learning? In secondary schools, when we combine two small secondary schools into one building, every student has access to a far greater number of courses and more teachers are teaching within their specialty. Students are more engaged in their learning when they can choose courses that interest them. It also ensures that our students have access to the courses they need for their chosen career path.

At the elementary level, it's more about ensuring we have the appropriate number of children in our schools in each of our programs - English/Core French; Early French Immersion (EFI); Middle French Immersion (MFI); and Alternative as well as reducing the number of times children transition from one school to another. Our preference is to have at least a class and a half at each grade level for each program. This allows for flexibility; we can be thoughtful when creating classes, getting the right mix of children, teachers and educational support workers. All this makes for great learning for younger children.

And this makes good financial sense. We want to spend every educational dollar on our students rather than on empty pupil places. With fewer buildings to maintain we can better invest in those we determine will be kept. Our greatest resource after our students is our staff. With fewer buildings we can concentrate our staff to provide our students with the supports they need to be successful at school.

This is change can be difficult for everyone involved. I've been through this process in another school district. It's tough because students, staff, and parents have a close relationship with their schools and their school communities. My experience was this: once the difficult decision is made, school staff and school councils do amazing things to introduce students to their new surroundings. Within a month or two, the students connect to their new school and/or the new students who have moved into their school. Staff adapt quickly and see new opportunities for their students and for themselves. In my experience, parents take a little longer because there are changes to family routines. While families adjust to these changes, school councils and staff are there to help parents with their transition into their child's new school.

So this is an opportunity to improve student learning across the district. Trustees and staff have worked diligently for the past 18 months to ensure that we have a clear, transparent process that allows for the appropriate amount of consultation and effective decision making. We will share information with parents and guardians throughout the process. We hope you'll take the time to learn more about the proposed changes.

We're looking forward to doing great things for our students!

Sincerely

Jennifer