

God Calls Us



EACH BY NAME

Letter to Parents and Guardians from Trustee Terry Harris, Ward 71 Fall 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians:

The Board of Trustees of Edmonton Catholic Schools is grateful for the opportunity to faithfully serve our students, families, and community. It has been almost 2 months since school re-entry, and we would like to thank students, families and staff for their support, patience, dedication, and hard work as we all navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic. We are pleased to share with you the Fall edition of *The Messenger*, which highlights the initiatives being undertaken by trustees in the community and can be accessed [here](#).

Leadership Staff and Academic Excellence

Since the quick transition from in-person learning to remote instruction in March, trustees, administration, parents, students, and staff, have been engaged in on-going planning and decision making regarding the Fall school re-entry plan. The robust plan that resulted enhanced the ability of our schools and sites to prepare to welcome back our students and staff to a safe and healthy environment without a sacrifice to instruction and service. While schools have experienced positive cases through “community transmission” into the schools, “in-school transmission” has been minimized. Continued vigilance is needed, particularly in the “pre-screening” at home to avoid sending children to school who are exhibiting symptoms. This is particularly important as we enter the flu season and a potential second wave of infections.

Understanding and Responding to Needs

At the beginning of the year, ECSD informed families there would be four opportunities within the school year to pivot from in-person to online or online to in-person learning. The Division needed to adjust that initial plan based on experiences over the first several weeks of the school year. The Edmonton Catholic School Division made the difficult decision to task parents with making a commitment to either online or in-person learning for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year. These decisions will be in effect until the end of June, 2021. These are challenging times and this decision was not made lightly by the Division.

The return to school has been welcoming and exciting for many students, while others may be feeling anxious. Edmonton Catholic Schools has worked diligently to manage risk and help ease anxiety. Our administration is regularly updating the ECSD School Re-Entry Handbook based on current information and guidance from both the Chief Medical Officer and the Minister of Education, and as more detailed guidance is developed within the Division (<https://www.ecsd.net/page/7013/ecsd-re-entry-plan>).

Our schools greatly miss the opportunity to welcome our parent partners into the schools and look forward to the opportunity of welcoming them back once again. The Board of Trustees is committed to providing a variety of supports for families during these uncertain times. To that end a number of parent engagement opportunities have been planned for the coming months. It is heartening to know that large number of people attended the first event, the Virtual Parent Meeting – *Supporting Your Child's Mental Health*, which was held on October 20th. We hope the strategies, information and resources that parents received at the town hall will help them lead their families towards a successful school year. Please click [here](#) to view the presentation.



LUMEN CHRISTI Catholic Education Centre

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I HAVE CALLED YOU BY NAME. YOU ARE MINE. - ISAIAH 43:1

Provincial Funding for Education

Please be assured that we, as a Board, will continue to lobby the provincial government for adequate additional funding and resources to support all facets of student learning that have been impacted by the pandemic, including enhancements for online learning programs.

- **Meetings with Elected Officials**

Trustees continue to schedule and meet individually with their locally elected representatives to advocate for the needs of our students.

- **Correspondence with the Minister of Education**

The Board has shared its concerns with the Minister regarding the struggles, economic pressures, and funding needs of our Division as we continue to support the families of Edmonton in their children's growth and development.

- **Networking with Stakeholders**

Trustees will be attending upcoming Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association and Alberta School Boards Association Fall general meetings, where trustees work in ongoing collaboration with others from across the Province to collectively advocate for the needs of school divisions and their communities.

Federal Funding for Education

Edmonton Catholic Schools was extremely pleased to receive \$15.6 million in Federal Government funding which will be used to partially offset a variety of COVID-related costs such as additional learning supports (staff and substitute costs), adaptation of learning spaces, facility alterations, personal protective equipment, cleaning supplies and sanitization, additional cleaning and custodial staff, online learning and teacher training, supports for special needs students, and transportation. Additional representations are being made to the Ministry to further enhance the COVID related funding for the Division.

Home/School/Parish Connection

The Bishops of Alberta, Yukon, and Northwest Territories released a pastoral statement on the *Impact of COVID -19 and the Call to Christian renewal*: <https://caedm.ca/PastoralScene/entryid/815/abnwt-bishops-release-pastoral-letter-on-the-impact-of-covid-19-the-call-to-christian-renewal>.

Grandin Media is hosting weekly panel discussions that continue through to November 2nd. With the leadership of the guest panelist and moderator, we are able to collectively reflect and discuss our Catholic social teachings in light of our present day COVID context: <https://grandinmedia.ca/bishops-reflections-on-covid/>.

The theme for Catholic Education Sunday (November 8, 2020) is *Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength (Isaiah 40:31)*. This theme resonates and supports the Alberta Bishops' Pastoral initiative on the COVID 19 *Call to Christian Renewal*, connects with Pope Francis' new Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* where the theme of hope is prominent, elicits action by using verbs that create a sense of movement and engagement, and is rooted in Scripture. The Division will be preparing materials that will be distributed ahead of Catholic Education Sunday.

We wish you a blessed and safe school year and look forward to connecting with you again through our winter letter, *The Messenger*, and in our community newspaper.

I am honored to serve Ward 71 as a trustee. You can reach me at 780-937-8268 or terence.harris@ecsd.net. You can also connect with me on Twitter: @_terryharris

God bless you and your family.



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