



Members Update for August 5th, 2021

Here's some items that we're updating all members on.....

Return to School Plan – On Tuesday I was in Brantford for OSBCU meetings on a couple different issues. During the meetings, the Ontario Government released their plan for school returning in a few weeks. CHCH showed up and wanted comments and Laura Walton, OSBCU President along with myself and another local president were interviewed for comments on what the plan contained and concerns our members have had during the pandemic. When the news ran Tuesday night, all they used was a 5 second clip of the other local president talking about stress and anxiety levels of members. I could go on about what I think about the plan, but I'm sure you already know what I think about anything this government has done when it comes to adequately protecting students and staff in schools when it comes to the pandemic. For now, I'll just give you the link to the so called plan if you want to take a few minutes to read it for yourself and see what changes we can expect to see next month when kids return. You can find the plan by clicking here:

<https://www.ontario.ca/document/covid-19-health-safety-and-operational-guidance-schools-2021-2022>

Ventilation – Proper and adequate ventilation is a big part of the return plan. Yes, our schools have been outfitted with higher rated filters which do a better job of cleaning the air coming in to our roof units and univents. But when you take that a step further – there is little to no difference in the actual air quality of our ventilation systems. Why? After that air comes into the roof unit, it gets pushed by the fan through ductwork into classrooms, offices and common areas. When is the last time you saw anyone cleaning ductwork in your school? That air is being pushed over dirt, dust and other stuff before it empties into classrooms and the rest of the school. End result – no difference in air quality. Your house is the same – change your filters on your furnace is a great thing to do regularly. But if you haven't cleaned the ducts for decades – you're breathing the same air you always have been as it passes over that stuff before coming out of your vents. So do I think the grandstanding of Minister Lecce talking about ventilation is actually having a real and measurable effect on the students and staff in schools – not for a second. It's political fluff and trickery, plain and simple.

Hamilton Spectator Article – Yesterday morning, both Laura Walton and myself had a phone interviews with the Hamilton Spectator about the return to school plan and our members reaction to it. My interview lasted about 25 minutes and covered a range of topics. The reporter contacted me yesterday afternoon and the article was on the Spec website and would be printed in today's paper. While the article doesn't touch on the issue of ventilation (which I talked about for about 5 minutes) and few other things – the article is positive and is truthful. While I'm not totally comfortable talking with media outlets (nerves and a bit of a speech issue since I was a kid), it is a good opportunity to get our members, the jobs we do and the importance of those jobs in front of the public and that's exactly what we should be doing. Advocating for the importance of our jobs and not being "just the people that empty garbage cans" as some like to think. Our roles and challenges in the schools are often overlooked while the media focuses on teachers – so every chance I get to speak up for what we do – I'll make the best of it. You can find the article here - <https://www.thespec.com/news/hamilton-region/2021/08/04/concerned-education-support-workers-seek-clear-guidance-on-back-to-school.html> or if you get the actual paper delivered, the article is on page 3 of today's paper.

New Software Coming – In the coming weeks, there will be a few new software programs coming online that will be of interest to our members. While I don't have all the information on them yet – here's what I do know:

New Absence System – The current software we use is SFX for reporting absences for permanent members. SFX is being replaced by a new piece of software created by the same company that handles our job applications – Apply To Education. A few months ago, Patrick Cumbo, Flora DiCarlo and myself saw a demonstration of the software and were happy with what it could do. It's basically the same for members to report absences – online or by phone – and follows the same general ideas of the SFX system. At some point in the next few weeks, there should be an announcement from the HR Department about the new system, when it will begin and any training on the new software. As of right now, we don't know any of those things, so when you see them, please check with your area supervisor if you are unsure about any piece of the software.

Absence Coverage - From what we understand today – starting in September, arranging coverage for absences will no longer be assigned to one supervisor (Eva Kern). The job of assigning coverages will be a twofold approach. When the new absence system receives an absence for a posted position, on the first day of absence the system will be automatically calling casuals (the same way Eva has been) until someone picks up and accepts the assignment. After the first day, the area supervisor will be assigned the task of asking anyone else in that location if they are interested in moving into that position, or staying where they are in their own position and ensuring there is proper coverage for the posted position. Obviously, I have some concerns about the ability of supervisors to do this job in their own areas and ensure it's done properly. When this is formally announced – hopefully with a more detailed explanation of the process – everyone will have to keep their eyes and ears open to ensure that things are done properly and follow an approved process. I'm sure this won't be the last we'll talk about this new piece of software.

Enhanced Cleaning Positions – As of today, we do NOT have any further info for members on who will be providing enhanced cleaning to schools or what the positions will look like. Will they be 8 hours per school, will they be 4 hours, will they be 2 hours? Will every school have one or will it be just the larger elementary schools? The HWDSB is waiting on further info from Hamilton Public Health about the requirements and guidelines they expect to see in Hamilton to ensure a safe school opening. Instead of making a policy for the entire province that all school boards should be following, the government has downloaded a lot of the decisions to local public health units. Shocking, I know. With the release of the back to school plan a few days ago and backlash to that plan still coming in and further parts of the plan still being announced – I don't expect any concrete decisions on the enhanced positions before the last week of August at this point. The only piece we do know right now is that the HWDSB has been funded for 22 FTE positions for 5 months (and possibly another 5 after that) to provide enhanced cleaning.

That's it for now – I wanted to get a few things out to you before I go on holidays next week. As of Tuesday August 10th, I'm on vacation and returning (as of now and pending meetings) on August 30th. Dave Winger and Mark Lachowicz will be looking after things while I'm gone as the Vice Presidents.

Thank you for all you've done to not only make the schools look their best for next month, but also make sure things are working as best as they can. Everyone has done a fantastic job this year and I'm very proud of what we've accomplished through all the turmoil and confusion of this past year. I'm cautiously optimistic that this year will get us back on the road to normal again. Normal schedules, normal duties and normal routines.

Cheers,

Blake