Dear Trustee and/or Superintendent,

We are writing to express our concerns over the decrease in parent involvement in school board matters and virtual learning arrangements. The WRDSB is scrambling hard to adjust to changes as a result of the pandemic, but not sufficiently informing or consulting parents and Parent Groups such as WRAPSC & PIC of these processes. We would like to be seen as a resource, not an afterthought.

We are aware that the Province keeps changing the parameters as COVID-19 concerns and cases change BUT WRDSB families and students are scrambling too; trying to help our children with schoolwork while working from home, arranging for child care during a Provincial Lockdown when we cannot stay at home for work, and managing/organizing technology and Internet needs, as well as being the social interaction for our children at a time in their lives that they should be interacting with peers. The digital divide has become a chasm, as families on the margins scramble to figure out technology and how to help their children. Trust in schools has dropped, as is evidenced by the drop in enrollment. Parents are expressing extreme frustration with the lack of information and the lack of resources. We are 11 months into the pandemic, and it does not look like it will let up anytime soon. We are under the assumption that the WRDSB has plans for when changes are needed and we are asking for clear communication. Parents and councils need to know what the criteria are for in person school, the standards that need to be met and how to prevent a drop back into distance learning. The adjustment is smoother if we are well informed, so that when a pivot is needed and alternate plans are announced we can be prepared.

**Here are some recent examples of communication & planning issues:**
1. Centennial Public School in Waterloo had a staff member receive COVID-19 positive results while at school and apparently symptomatic. Parents at the school first found out through local news outlets about the Ministry of Labour investigations. No further communication has come to the school community or the larger community about this case and investigation since early December. While it is understood that the investigation may be ongoing and respecting privacy of the individual staff member, it is expected that the WRDSB would communicate updates (even if nothing has yet changed) to try and remedy the trust that has now been broken in that school.

2. Parents who decided to go use the hard copy curriculum route (paper based/no technology) had to wait until early November to get their curriculum, losing precious time, and causing inequitable access. The information about the delays was not helpful and caused more frustration.

3. WRDSB staff changes & Committee head changes were made that affect PIC & WRAPSC, but parent members were not informed. There are Board Committees that have not met for 18 months or more, without interim communication. Some School Councils were actively discouraged from meeting, even on Zoom. We still have not heard the results of the survey that came out in late 2020.

Many credible organizations[[1]](#footnote-1) are advocating for a more student and family centered approach, while maintaining safety and keeping families involved and informed. Again, recognizing that this pandemic is expected to continue for quite some time and that most likely school will still be operating under the current model (not back to normal) for Fall 2021, more of a focus needs to be placed on student’s mental health, equitable access to education, technological training and supports for staff, families and students. As well, evidence-based criteria need to be made public when making decisions about cleaning protocols, weighing risks of isolating students with possible exposure risk, and how curriculum and evaluation of learning is done. If you don’t communicate this, we don’t know how or why decisions are made. The portal for self screening is a good step, but these things need to be better publicized. We ask that you, the WRDSB, prioritize family engagement and communication with families more going forward, as well as advocate at the Ministry of Education level for the supports to do so. Important decisions such as the potential cancellation of March Break constantly come up, and we would like to be consulted.

**Potential Solutions:**

1. **Support paid time to connect with families**. Have staff dedicated to leading schoolwide family engagement. There is a direct link between student success and family engagement. We don’t want students to disengage because their families are so overwhelmed.

2. **Invest in family members as co-educators.** Parents often have no idea as to what their child is supposed to be doing. We need the goals for the year/semester identified, the steps mapped, and the due dates. A goal without a plan is just a wish. Links to Provincial curriculum documents would also be helpful. Students in secondary school do get more direction, but that does not mean a parent can understand the documents. This is especially true of ESL families.

3. **Look for new spaces and ways to engage families**. For example, the Cedarbrae & Churchill principals met with families in a park – an excellent idea.

4. **Work more with community partners such as PIC & WRAPSC**
Families face a multitude of different situations, so you need to work with partners that are in touch with a wide variety of families. That means having these parents/guardians on committees and calling the chairs with specific questions.

5. **More action from Trustees**When WRAPSC members watch the Board meetings, the emphasis seems to be more on policy updates than the current pandemic. We need to see visible proactive initiatives on behalf of our students. We should be advocating for rapid testing access so that when children return to school cases can be caught quickly. Asymptomatic students who have been exposed at school need to be tested. Trustees need to push our Province to prioritize school children.

**Conclusion**One of the Strategic Priorities of the WRDSB is to have families & caregivers supported in creating the best possible outcomes for our students. We feel this priority has not been maintained, even though it is essential for student success and parental trust in institutions. We would welcome the chance to improve this situation for the benefit of all parties and work with you to achieve this.

Sincerely,

[insert name here]

WRAPSC member

1. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/covid-teens-mental-health-1.5884240>; <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-family-school-relationships-are-the-missing-link-in-covid-19-era-education/2020/10?cmp=soc-twitter-shr>; <https://www.sickkids.ca/en/news/archive/2021/covid19-updated-guidance-school-operation-during-pandemic/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)