



Media Release

For Immediate Release
September 2, 2020

Grand Erie's Online Learning Plan for 2020-21 Includes Creation of Virtual School

Brantford Ont. – With approximately 17 per cent of Grand Erie's more than 26,000 students opting for online learning this fall, the Board is creating a centralized Virtual Academy to serve the unique needs of students in Kindergarten to Grade 12 with online learning. The Virtual Academy is set to begin the week of September 14.

"With a number of families choosing online learning, a focus of our back-to-school planning has meant envisioning how best to create the classroom experience for our students who will be learning at home," said JoAnna Roberto, Director of Education. "The creation of our Virtual Academy means we can centralize learning resources and expertise, and work with teaching staff dedicated to delivering curriculum in the online environment."

The Virtual Academy will aim to replicate the format of in-class learning for students in Kindergarten to Grade 12 with a predictable school-day schedule, a balance of instructional methods and activities, and interactive components. A typical day will include a combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning, meaning part of each day will be dedicated to lessons delivered live, with the remainder of the day spent on independent or group assignments and activities. Uploaded content and individual supports will also be provided. The Virtual Academy will also have its own Principals: Lori Barkans and Laurie Murray will be responsible for elementary, with Greg Carruthers and Dave MacDonald overseeing secondary.

Teachers in the Virtual Academy will be using the same content and expectations the Ontario curriculum lays out for in-class learning. Daily attendance will be taken, and parents can expect the same communication and assistance from teachers. Technology support will also be available.

Roberto emphasized that the online learning model and the creation of the Virtual Academy will be a significant departure from the "emergency learning at home" that followed province-wide school closures this past spring. Parents will also have the option of switching from online learning to in-class instruction at designated points throughout the 2020-21 school year. For elementary, these dates are: October 13, January 4 and March 22. For secondary, these dates are: October 29, January 19 and April 7.

"We've been able to plan for a very intentional model of online learning that utilizes the possibilities technology provides, and engages students according to their individual needs," said Roberto. "Regardless of which model of learning families opt for this fall, they can be assured that our focus is on a safe and successful school year for all of our students."

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