

January 12, 2021

Memorandum to: Chairs of District School Boards
Directors of Education
School Authorities

From: Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education

Nancy Naylor
Deputy Minister

Subject: Ministry of Education Updates

Thank you for your continued support for students, families and staff.

In light of the current public health environment and based on advice from the Chief Medical Officer of Health, the Ontario government is providing the following updated direction:

- Elementary and secondary students in Windsor-Essex, Peel Region, Toronto, York and Hamilton Public Health Units (PHUs) will continue to learn remotely and will return to in-person learning on February 10, 2021.
- By January 20, 2021 the Chief Medical Officer of Health will advise the Ministry of Education on which PHUs may be permitted to resume in-person instruction as of January 25, based on the most up-to-date data and modelling.
- Boards will be required to align with the direction provided for the PHU in which their schools are located.
- Students in northern PHUs returned to in-person learning on January 11, 2021 and these schools will continue to be open. Some northern schools have been closed based on direction of local PHUs and school boards should continue to follow local PHU direction.

School board and school-based staff who can work from home will continue to be asked to do so. Schools will continue to be open so that in-person instruction of students with special education needs who cannot be accommodated through remote learning continues throughout this period and to support staff who are unable to work from home.

Child care centres and home-based licensed and unlicensed child care remain open during this time. During this extended period of online learning, in areas where in-person instruction for elementary students is suspended, emergency child care will continue. Before and after school programs in southern PHUs, which were mandated to close for the duration of elementary school closures, will reopen in alignment with the return to in-person learning in their PHUs.

We continue to ask school boards to make their school facilities available for the continuous delivery of child care, including emergency child care.

To support the return of in-person learning and based on advice from the Chief Medical Officer of Health, additional health and safety measures are being introduced to support students and staff across the province as they return to school. The ministry will be working with the Ministry of Health to update school board guidance documents with these additional measures. Updated documents will follow shortly.

Screening

More information on screening will be available over the coming days. Students, staff and families can continue to access the COVID-19 school and child care screening tool by visiting <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/school-screening/>.

Masking

Masking will now be compulsory for all students in Grades 1-3. Reasonable exceptions on the requirement to wear masks will apply. This masking requirement will be additional to the existing requirement for students in Grades 4-12. Students in Kindergarten will continue to be encouraged but will not be required to wear masks.

Masking requirements will also be in place for specified outdoor activities where physical distancing is not possible. More information on this requirement will follow in the updated school board guidance documents.

Congregating

To support provincial efforts to stop further spread of COVID-19, school boards are asked to highlight the importance of students not congregating before school starts and returning directly home after school.

Expanded Targeted Testing

Phase 1 of the approach to targeted testing in schools saw over 9,000 students, staff and household members tested in over 60 schools. Building on these efforts, the ministry will continue to work with the Ministry of Health, Ontario Health, local public health units and school boards to promote safe learning environments through expanded access to COVID-19 testing.

The ministry will be expanding targeted testing for students, staff and their respective households. Testing will be voluntary and will also include child care settings. Schools and child care settings will be identified by local public health, with a focus on those experiencing outbreaks, with high case counts, or in high priority communities.

Testing has helped to identify cases early, inform public health decisions, and manage outbreaks. Expanding access to testing will be a valuable tool for parts of the province experiencing high levels of community transmission and outbreaks.

Thank you for the ongoing partnership as we have worked to keep schools safe and contributed to stopping the provincewide spread of COVID-19 during this time.

Sincerely,

Stephen Lecce
Minister

Nancy Naylor
Deputy Minister

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