

April 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 Update

As you know, our Chief Medical Officer of Health has confirmed that the transmission of COVID-19 in schools has remained low, and schools remain a place for students to learn safely with appropriate measures in place.

However, the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve rapidly, and we recognize that the students and staff in the education system play an important role in supporting efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19. Cases across Ontario communities are rising quickly, and the new COVID-19 variants pose a serious threat.

In consultation with Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health it has been determined that elementary and secondary school students province-wide will participate in remote learning following the April Break.

The government will continue to listen to the advice of public health experts, and we will update parents once a safe return to in-person learning is recommended.

This approach does not apply to First Nation and federally operated schools.

Remote Learning

Remote learning will be provided for all students in alignment with [Policy/Program Memorandum \(PPM\) No.164: Requirements for Remote Learning](#). This PPM makes clear very specific standards for instruction of synchronous learning so that parents and students know what to expect and there is a consistent approach across the province to ensure students are fully engaged in their learning. School boards are asked to distribute technology to students and staff to support remote learning, as required.

To support the Stay-At-Home order all staff who are able will work from home. Staff who are unable to provide remote instruction from home will be permitted to do so in schools, only where rationale has been provided and approved by the school board.

Any staff required to provide remote instruction in schools must not congregate with other staff and avoid use of school space outside the classroom.

Student Supports

As in previous shifts to remote learning, boards must ensure that plans are in place to support students with special education needs to learn remotely that leverage the capacity of education workers and board professionals (e.g., behavioural experts, speech language pathologists, and other professionals) to support remote learning.

As part of our Government's efforts to protect the most vulnerable, boards are expected to make provisions for in-person support for students with special education needs who cannot be accommodated through remote learning based on student needs.

Most students with special education needs will be learning remotely during this period. In-person learning should be reserved for students who cannot be accommodated through remote learning. School boards are best positioned to determine which students with special education needs may require this accommodation. School boards have flexibility in determining how to deliver in-person instruction in such circumstances, based on local conditions. However, consideration should be given to limiting overall movement and limiting the number of sites that will be open.

With students moving to remote learning, prioritization of education staff who provide direct support to students with complex special education needs across the province, and all education workers in select hot spot areas in Toronto and Peel will continue. Starting today, these elementary and secondary school staff that have received the relevant information from their school boards will be eligible to register for vaccination.

The ministry continues to encourage school boards to work closely with local First Nations and take steps to ensure continuity of learning for enrolled First Nation students who may live on reserve and/or require additional supports.

It is important that school boards have safety plans in place for those students who are experiencing or could be expected to experience mental health challenges. Safety plans should include provisions for students to have continued remote access to services, through the school, community child and youth mental health or local healthcare partners.

In addition, students and families should be provided with information about the mental health resources that are available to them, including Kids Help Phone, which offers 24/7 counselling and referral services across the province. To use this free resource, children can call 1-800-668-6868, or text CONNECT to 686868.

School Mental Health Ontario also has a number of great resources for students, parents and families on their website at www.smho-smso.ca. In addition, child and youth mental health agencies across the province continue to provide services.

Learning Resources

The Ministry of Education recently announced the launch of two new portals, [TVO Learn](#) and [TFO IDÉLLO, apprendre à la maison](#), which provide supports for students learning remotely by accessing additional educational resources developed by Ontario certified teachers.

In addition, secondary students can continue to access TVO's [Independent Learning Centre \(ILC\) Open House](#) and [Portes ouvertes pour les cours TVO ILC in French-language](#), which provide access to 144 Grade 9 to 12 courses. These ILC resources are designed to provide flexible learning opportunities to help students keep up with their learning or deepen their understanding of a specific subject.

[Eurêka](#) is a service available to French-language students and families that provides resources and supports for all subjects, Grades 1-12.

Boards are encouraged to share links to these resources with all students and families, as well as educators who may choose to incorporate these resources in their lessons.

Student Transportation

While elementary and the secondary panels are learning remotely, student transportation services will only be provided for special needs students who cannot be accommodated through remote learning based on student needs.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Cleaning Supplies and Equipment (CSE) Shipments

The ministry will continue to work with you to support your PPE needs throughout this period.

Child Care Centres in Schools

We recognize that the closure of schools will have an impact on families who may be unable to care for their child at home. In light of this, we are directing schools to continue to provide access to their on-site child care centres and to authorized recreational and skill building programs, when those programs are permitted to operate.

The ministry is working with our Consolidated Municipal Service Managers and District Social Service Administration Boards to provide Emergency Child Care (ECC) programs for school-aged children for health care and other frontline workers, free of charge for parents.

Thank you for the ongoing partnership. We are encouraged that the availability of high-quality remote learning across Ontario will ensure the success of student learning during this time.

Sincerely,

Stephen Lecce
Minister

Nancy Naylor
Deputy Minister

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