



**Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)**  
**Fédération des enseignantes et des enseignants de l'élémentaire de l'Ontario (FEEO)**  
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February 3, 2021

Nancy Naylor  
Deputy Minister of Education  
Ministry of Education  
5th Flr, 438 University Ave  
Toronto ON M7A 2A5

Dear Ms. Naylor:

On behalf of the Elementary Teacher's Federation of Ontario (ETFO) I want to thank you for the opportunity to meet on February 2 to seek our input on the status of March break for this school year.

I am writing to confirm ETFO's firm opposition to delaying or cancelling March break for the current school year. Our members have been working under incredible pressure since the beginning of the pandemic, often without the necessary support and resources. The unprecedented demands on educators have led to high levels of stress which is impacting their mental health and well-being. This is compounded by the fact that many ETFO members were told just before the winter break that they would have to switch from in-class teaching to online, causing many to work through their winter breaks to prepare.

Postponing or cancelling March break would not only create more chaos in the public education system, but also push many educators beyond their limits. The risk of burnout is increasingly concerning; educators, students and their families need the brief respite that March break provides.

Since the pandemic began, ETFO has been advocating for the implementation of measures that would make schools safe for students and educators. We have called for smaller classes to allow for physical distancing, appropriate ventilation in all classrooms, masking for all students and asymptomatic surveillance testing. Many of these calls have gone unheeded and have resulted in chaotic school closures.

The increase in COVID-19 positivity rates in children that began in late November and continued into early January is very concerning, especially considering the recent arrival of more infectious COVID-19 variants to Ontario. Given the lack of sufficient school-based data due to the absence of surveillance testing, it is difficult to conclusively measure the impact of schools in community spread of the virus, however there is

growing evidence that schools contributed to the rise of cases during this second wave of the pandemic.

Given the uncertainty regarding the role that schools have played or could play in the spread of COVID-19, it is not clear that cancelling or postponing March break would have the stated effect of preventing or decreasing community transmission.

It was clear from the meeting held on February 2, that there was no support from any of the stakeholders present for the proposed changes to March break. We urge you to abandon these proposals and instead focus on implementing the necessary measures to ensure the safety of students, educators and their families.

Our members will continue to do their best to support their students. We ask that the Ministry of Education do its part by showing that it values the mental health and well-being of educators, students and their families. We look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sharon', followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Sharon O'Halloran  
General Secretary

SO:FC