

December 16, 2021

VIA EMAIL: doug.fordco@pc.ola.org

The Honorable Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Room 281
Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Re: Learning Following the December 2021 Break

Dear Premier Ford,

We write to you at a time when COVID-19 case numbers in Ontario are increasing exponentially due to the incredibly infectious Omicron variant, to request that your government implement more effective infection prevention and control measures than have been announced to date. We firmly believe that these measures must be in place as soon as possible so that in-person learning and the considerable benefits it brings can continue following the holidays.

We are already at the point where historic investments in Ontario's public education system will be required to remedy the learning deficits and the student mental health consequences caused by the repeated disruptions to in-person learning since the onset of the pandemic. Unfortunately, given the spread of Omicron, further action is required now to ensure the safety of our schools and communities. Every day counts, and we are concerned that the measures announced on December 15th will fail to sufficiently stunt the spread of the virus. Below, we set out the measures that we believe should be implemented.

As you know, Ontario's education unions representing teachers, education workers, and other school staff have long expressed support for mandatory vaccinations in schools. To provide the greatest level of protection to Ontario's students and communities, we believe that everyone working in, or attending a school or campus who is eligible and can be vaccinated safely, should be vaccinated.

Today, given the clear benefits of a third booster shot in the face of the rapidly spreading Omicron variant, we urge you to prioritize access to these booster shots for our members and their colleagues so that they may be certain to receive the booster

before their return to school in January. We also urge you to both publicly promote the importance of vaccines for all students and ensure the administrative and logistical infrastructure is in place to give the over two million Ontario students access to vaccines over the winter break. We share the view of our colleagues at the Ontario Public School Boards Association that COVID-19 be added to the list of designated diseases in *Ontario Regulation 261/13 Designated Diseases* under the *Immunization of School Pupils Act* (ISPA).

In schools, given the growing awareness and acceptance that the virus is airborne, we believe that HEPA filters should be installed in all classrooms and public spaces prior to the return to classrooms in January. We would also suggest, as we have previously communicated, that both better masks such as N95 or KN95 masks and Rapid Antigen Tests be made available for all school staff over the winter break and into the New Year.

In addition to these school-specific suggestions, it is critical that additional community-based measures to limit the spread of the virus are implemented. We believe that effective immediately these measures should include reduced capacity and enforcement of vaccine passports and masking at all organized indoor events for non-essential events and activities.

Further, in order that sick employees do not infect their colleagues at work, we ask that you expand the paid sick leave program immediately, as given the persistence of this pandemic, the three days this temporary program provides are insufficient. Finally, all businesses, but especially larger ones, should have easy access to testing capacity to ensure employees are tested if they have any symptoms to limit outbreaks at worksites.

We understand that this letter sets out measures that will take considerable political will to implement, especially given Ontarians' fatigue with this pandemic. Nevertheless, in the face of this variant, we firmly believe these measures are necessary now if Ontario's students are to have a chance of returning to their schools and campuses in January. We encourage you to contact us to discuss these measures and how we can assist in their implementation.

Yours truly,

Karen Brown, President
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario

Barb Dobrowolski, President
Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association

Karen Littlewood, President
Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation

Anne Vinet-Roy, présidente
Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens

cc :

VIA EMAIL: christine.elliott@pc.ola.org

The Honorable Christine Elliott
Minister of Health
5th Floor, 777 Bay St.
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

VIA EMAIL: stephen.lecce@pc.ola.org

The Honorable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
5th Floor, 438 University Ave.
Toronto, ON M5G 2K8