



Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)
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The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
5th Floor
438 University Ave
Toronto, ON M5G 2K8

Dear Minister Lecce:

Much of our collective focus has been on the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on in-person learning. Educators firmly believe that quality in-person learning, when done safely, is what is best for our students. There are several actions which need to be taken to address the health and safety of our schools. However, there also remain critical issues which threaten the sustainability of emergency distance learning.

We believe modifications are required to PPM 164 to respect teacher professional judgment and to ensure families stay engaged in public education until all students can return to in-person learning. Staff have raised the issue specifically regarding the rigidity of minimum synchronous learning requirements in PPM 164. As you know, four- and five-year-olds are expected to attend 180 minutes of synchronous learning while students in grades 1-8 require a minimum of 225 minutes.

The Canadian Paediatric Society continues to counsel parents to *minimize* young children's screen time. Prolonged screen time can cause sleep disturbances and lead to depression and obesity. Educators in remote learning programs need to build in breaks and physical activity for their students. The Ministry's mandated minimum times for synchronous learning are very challenging for young children.

Educators are still seeing many of the same challenges that occurred last spring for some families including sick family members, stress, lack of engagement, no adult at home to supervise, limitations of technology and internet connectivity issues. They are left to do their best to accommodate a wide variety of specific needs related to the online elements while also supporting existing learning needs.

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As you know, many educators are also parents themselves and are balancing multiple responsibilities as they support their students through this pandemic. Providing local school boards the flexibility to respond to the needs of education workers, is necessary to sustain this type of programming.

With a membership that is over 80% women, we are acutely aware of the disproportionate impact this pandemic has had on women. The disruptions to childcare and school resulting from the pandemic, as well as the effect of necessary public health measures, such as limiting contact to a single household, have led to many challenges. These extra burdens for Ontario families have been largely carried by women.

We are focused on ensuring families stay engaged in public education despite the significant challenges and frequent closing of schools. We are also deeply concerned about the impact on educators' well-being caused by the rigidity of certain directions from the Ministry, like PPM 164. These concerns have been raised by staff with the Deputy Minister and I hope that modifications are forthcoming.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sam Hammond". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping "S" and a long horizontal line extending from the "H".

Sam Hammond
President

SH:JT:KK