

Ministry of Education

Minister

315 Front Street West
Toronto ON M7A 0B8

Ministère de l'Éducation

Ministre

315, rue Front Ouest
Toronto ON M7A 0B8



July 30, 2020

Dear Parents –

I hope you and your families are continuing to stay healthy and strong as the province continues to fight against the COVID-19 virus.

It has been just over four months since I first wrote to you after the government's decision to close schools and protect the lives of students, families, and the communities where they live and work. A lot has changed in these past four months. However, the one constant is the united effort of parents, students, and families to keep our communities and province safe.

The public health situation across the province has clearly evolved, and I am very proud that in recent weeks the trend has been in a positive direction. From the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak, every action we have taken has been guided by the underlying principle of keeping your children safe, and by extension the safety of yourselves and your communities as well. Clearly, we all have an important role to play.

The [plan](#) we unveiled today, following the advice of Canada's leading medical and scientific experts — including the Chief Medical Officer of Health, the Hospital for Sick Children, and the COVID-19 Command Table — sets out guidelines that will allow students across the province to safely return to class in September. These include:

- The full reopening of all publicly funded elementary schools five days a week;
- Allowing most secondary schools to reopen with an adapted model, with those in lower risk communities reopening five days a week, and;
- Ensuring you have a choice for in-class or online learning, and the latitude to change that decision throughout the year.

The best available medical advice tells us that we need to get our children back in our schools. We know that COVID-19 has taken a profound toll on Ontario's students.

Earlier today, the Premier and I unveiled our plan to get your kids back into the classroom with incredible new supports and resources in place to make sure they are as safe and supported as possible.

The government is providing over \$300 million to purchase masks and personal protective equipment, add new teaching positions, provide enhanced cleaning supplies

and more staff for schools and school busses, and health and safety professional development for all staff.

Moreover, Ontario will be unique in providing a mobile network of 500 public health nurses that will be deployed in regions with higher risks, to support improved screening, testing, and medical support in our schools. Finally, Ontario Public Health will be conducting surveillance testing on asymptomatic secondary school students to strengthen our response, and to better understand the risk.

The full suite health and safety protocols unveiled today are strong, informed by medical science, and will be flexible to respond to the changing threat of COVID-19. I can assure you we stand ready to respond to the changing reality of this virus.

This guidance will keep students safe by providing clarity around:

- Self-screening;
- Enhanced hand hygiene for students and staff;
- Mandatory masking for grades 4 to 12;
- PPE for teachers and staff and a reserve of cloth masks for students who may need one;
- Aggressive cohorting (or grouping) of students to reduce interaction outside of class;
- Distancing;
- Enhanced cleaning and disinfecting of school facilities and busses along with the hiring of 900 additional custodians;
- Restrictions on visitors;
- Pre-registration to aid in controlled reopening.

We will continue to invest in student mental health, which we all know is a critical need for students as they return to school after months of uncertainty and anxiety caused by the COVID-19 outbreak. This year alone, we are investing \$20 million in additional funding, so that boards can deliver proactive supports for students who need them. Students will have unprecedented access to mental health staff and supports, and we will invest a record-level \$50 million this year.

The school restart plan also provides important supports for students with special education needs, including a requirement that they be in class 5 days a week both in elementary and secondary schools. Experts have been clear, consistency is important, and that is what we will deliver for these children.

As we have said all along, we will never waver in our commitment to Ontario's students. By working together we can ensure that they are set up for success, not just for this year, but well into the future.

I want to thank you, Ontario's parents, for your hard work, input, and joint-commitment to ensuring a safe return to school in September.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Lecce". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and a long, sweeping underline.

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education