



Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)
Fédération des enseignantes et des enseignants de l'élémentaire de l'Ontario (FEEO)
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Medical Officers of Health
Ontario Public Health Units

Dear Medical Officers of Health:

On behalf of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) and our 83,000 members, I want to thank you for your tireless work during this unprecedented public health crisis.

Ontario is now amid a third wave of this pandemic driven by more infectious COVID-19 variants and poor decisions made by the provincial government. The government has prioritized economic activity and appeasing business interests over the need to reduce the spread of the virus and protect the health of Ontarians. The result has been disastrous, ICU occupancy is currently at the highest level since the beginning of the pandemic and the health care system is nearing collapse in many parts of the province.

Community spread of the virus has grown dramatically in certain parts of the province. The virus is propagating in workplaces and schools in many communities. More than one in four schools in the province currently have active COVID-19 cases. The incidence of cases in schools is likely much higher, but because the government has failed to provide sufficient access to asymptomatic testing, we simply do not know to what extent.

The government's vaccination plan has failed to protect educators and other front-line workers and has failed to prevent the increase in cases.

Yesterday, Dr. Lawrence Loh, Medical Officer of Health for Peel Region made the courageous decision to close schools to in-person learning to slow the spread of the virus, and to protect students, educators and their families. Dr. Loh, alongside the medical officers of health for Toronto and Ottawa have written to the province urging them to take further steps to try to prevent the collapse of our public health care system.

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Some PHUs have already begun to prioritize education workers for access to the vaccine. If you have not yet done so, we ask that your PHU provide immediate access to the COVID-19 vaccine to all education workers and other front-line workers.

In those parts of the province where community transmissions are high, we also ask that you use your authority to order schools to temporarily close in-person learning and switch to virtual learning until vaccines have been rolled out to education workers and have begun to take effect, and community rates of transmission have been reduced.

Finally, we ask that you require additional layers of protection in schools for in-person learning to resume or continue including:

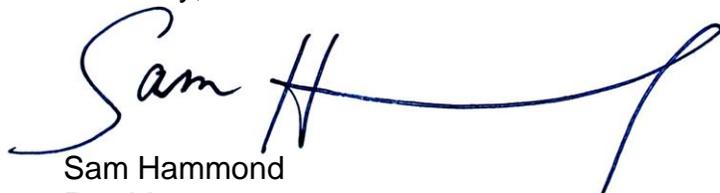
- providing N95 masks to education workers to protect against airborne transmission;
- reducing class sizes to allow for physical distancing;
- making masks mandatory for all students, including Kindergarten;
- making improvements to ventilation and air filtration; and
- ensuring broad uptake of asymptomatic testing in schools.

Throughout this school year, ETFO members have been doing their absolute best under exceptionally difficult circumstances to keep everyone in our public schools safe and healthy. The provincial government downloaded the responsibility to keep our schools safe to local school boards and did not provide necessary resources and then downloaded the responsibility of leading the vaccination efforts to public health units without an adequate plan in place.

Ontarians simply cannot wait for the Ford government to start listening to medical experts and implement the necessary measures. You have the necessary authority to both prioritize education workers and other essential workers for access to the COVID-19 vaccine and where necessary temporary shut-down in-person learning to protect students and educators. We urge you to act now.

You and your colleagues have a monumental challenge ahead of you, but please know that the public servants and front-line workers who have maintained services throughout this pandemic are ready to support your important work.

Sincerely,



Sam Hammond
President

Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario