Memorandum to:	Chairs of District School Boards Directors of Education School Authorities
From:	Stephen Lecce Minister of Education Nancy Naylor Deputy Minister
Subject:	Ministry of Education Update on the 2020/21 School Year

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Thank you for your continued support for students, families and staff.

We are at a critical point in our fight against COVID-19 and in support of this effort, elementary and secondary school students will continue learning remotely for the remainder of this school year.

We are inspired by our students and educators each and every day and by undertaking this approach we are supporting a healthy and safe summer and start to the school year in September.

Student Supports

Boards will continue to ensure that plans are in place to support students with special education needs to learn remotely that leverage the capacity of education workers and board professionals (e.g. behavioural experts, speech language pathologists, and other professionals) to support remote learning and to continue in-person support for students with special education needs who cannot be accommodated through remote learning based on student needs.

Mental Health Supports

It is important that school boards have safety plans in place for those students who are experiencing or could be expected to experience mental health challenges. Safety plans should include provisions for students to have continued access to remote or in-person services, through the school, community child and youth mental health service providers or local healthcare partners.

In addition, students and families should be provided with information about the mental health resources that are available to them through their school board as well as through other providers, including Kids Help Phone, which offers 24/7 counselling and referral services across the province. To use this free resource, children can call 1-800-668-6868, or text CONNECT to 686868.

School Mental Health Ontario also has a number of great resources for students, parents and families on their website at www.smho-smso.ca. In addition, child and youth mental health agencies across the province continue to provide services.

Summer Learning, Learning Recovery and Renewal

The ministry will continue to work with school boards on plans to address disruptions that have impacted student learning and engagement. Webinars for school board re-engagement leads are taking place this week.

On May 4th, the ministry communicated key themes and investments of $85.5 million that will be the focus of learning recovery and renewal, including student mental health and well-being, supports for early reading and math and the re-engagement of students. As we learn more about the impact of the pandemic on student learning we will continue to add to our learning recovery and renewal strategies (2021: SB11).

An important component of learning recovery and renewal and preparation for returning to in-person learning next year is summer learning. The ministry has made available $62 million for summer learning (2021: SB04 Federal Safe Return to Class Fund: 2020-21 Spring and Summer Learning Opportunities for School Boards, March 25, 2021).

While provincial health data continues to evolve, school boards are asked to continue to be flexible in their summer programming and plan for multiple delivery options that include in-person and/or remote teaching and learning.

We appreciate the careful consideration of school boards in reaching out to students who would most benefit from additional support this spring and summer and encourage their participation. Continuity of learning is critical to prepare students with the knowledge and skills for success in the next grade, course or postsecondary destination. As students continue to face challenges leading to disengagement from learning, summer programs can provide credit accumulation, credit recovery and reach ahead opportunities; targeted math and literacy supports; and programs for under-served students, students with special education needs, and students with mental health needs.

Targeted Testing

Thank you for your continued support of the Targeted Testing Program, to date, over 7,000 schools have been offered testing with over 60,000 tests completed and a positivity rate of 0.75%.

The requirement for school boards to offer mobile testing to 5% of schools each week will be lifted for the month of June. Testing for staff and students will continue to be available at pharmacies across the province and school boards who are interested in offering mobile testing will continue to have access to the ministry's mobile testing vendors and ministry support.

Vaccinations

Thank you for your support of the recent vaccination expansion to youth aged 12 and over.

To ensure as many youth as possible are fully vaccinated before the start of the school year, the province expects to provide a first dose to all willing youth aged 12 to 17 before the end of June, and a second dose before the end of August 2021.

To ensure access to COVID-19 vaccination for youth aged 12 to 17 in Ontario's 31 fly-in northern communities and Moosonee, Ornge will lead Operation Remote Immunity 2.0 starting on May 31, 2021. The province is expecting to administer first and second doses to youth aged 12 and over in each of these communities by the end of July.

We are also pleased to confirm that education and child care staff who choose to receive the vaccine will be able to be fully vaccinated by August 15, 2021, subject to supply.

End of Year Celebrations

We know how important it is for students, families and staff to have an opportunity to reconnect in-person, where safe to do so, to conclude this school year.

The ministry will work with the Council of Directors of Education (CODE) and the Ministry of Health on providing guidance to support implementation.

Personal Property Retrieval

Building on practices implemented at the end of last school year, school boards should prepare plans to allow access by students or families to retrieve personal property or return school property. School boards must implement protocols to provide for the health and safety of students, families and staff during this process. School boards are encouraged to engage their local public health units on their plans.

Child Care

Emergency child care will continue for eligible school-aged children across the province until the last day of elementary school instruction in your region. We continue to ask school boards to make their school facilities available for the continuous delivery of child care, including emergency child care.

Thank you for the ongoing partnership as we have worked to keep schools safe and contributed to stopping the provincewide spread of COVID-19.

Sincerely,

Stephen Lecce
Minister

Nancy Naylor
Deputy Minister

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