

To: ETFO Thames Valley Teacher Local Members
From: Craig Smith, President, ETFO Thames Valley Teacher Local (ETFO TVTL)
Date: March 12, 2021
Regarding: Summary of Meeting with Deputy Minister of Education (Shared with Local Presidents)

Presidents, today I met with the Deputy Minister and her staff. Our last meeting was cancelled so it has been some time since you have had one of these updates. The summary of the meeting is as follows:

1. Masking/Mask Exemptions

The issue of mask exemptions being granted by school boards based on creed was raised as a concern by the Affiliates. The Ministry issued clarification re masking exemptions stating that they should be “rare and based on a medical issue.” The Human Rights Tribunal has also provided some guidance on the issue of exemptions and creed was not identified as a ground for exemption. The Deputy Minister was asked to further clarify this with school boards.

2. Attendance Support Programs

The Deputy Minister was asked to provide some guidance to school boards on the issue of Attendance Support Programs. This issue has been raised as a concern in the past at previous meetings. Some boards are continuing to push ahead with these programs and it seems to contradict what is being expressed as a concern for employee mental health. Everyone is operating with increased stress, fear and anxiety during this pandemic and this scrutiny over attendance should not be added to the mix. The Deputy Minister indicated that she would raise the issue again in an upcoming meeting.

3. Airborne Transmission

The Affiliates asked about what additional measures are being taken to address issues of airborne transmission of the virus. The following suggestions were made to reduce airborne transmission in schools: Co2 monitors, staggered schedules for lunch, recess etc, more plexiglass in schools, increased use of shields. Dr. Tepper responded and shared that the Science Table looked at this issue more broadly last week-end. They will be issuing some statements/reflection on this. He then stated that the current advice stands.

4. Vaccine Readiness

The Deputy Minister discussed the status of the vaccine roll-out plan. She shared the following information: there has been an acceleration of the delivery of Pfizer vaccines, the Johnson and Johnson vaccine is now approved but the government awaiting information on delivery dates and the Astra Zeneca vaccine is now being administered for 60-64 year olds in selected pharmacies.

She also stated that there has been a further spacing out of time between the first and second vaccine. Four months is now considered safe but there are some exceptions to this. Things are expected to move more quickly now.

Educators will be vaccinated in Phase 2. The prioritization of education workers has not been confirmed. They are considering priority amongst those workers who are in schools (an example of special education workers being given first priority) as well as priority between those working in schools and those working virtually. No decision has been made on these issues at this time. The Deputy Minister indicated that she would share more information on this aspect when it is available.

5. Testing Data

The Deputy Minister shared that they are posting the school testing data every Friday. They are currently in week three of this process. To date, 711 schools have participated and over 2,000 tests have been conducted. Over 200 pharmacies are also currently testing. The Ministry intends to add this data to the site in the near future.

6. Retired Teacher Data

The Ministry has shared the data on retired teacher usage with OTF. The data is from September to December. They are still pulling the January data together. They are in the process of reviewing the data to establish usage rates and to also identify where there may be issues with the 95 day rule.

Sharon O'Halloran
General Secretary

For more information regarding this *summary* please contact the ETFO Local office by phone at 519-474-3150 or by email at etfotvtl@etfothamesvalley.com.