

To: ETFO Thames Valley Teacher Local Members

From: Craig Smith, President, ETFO Thames Valley Teacher Local (ETFO TVTL)

Date: September 4, 2020

Regarding: Summary of Meeting with Deputy Minister of Education (Shared with Local Presidents)

Good afternoon Presidents, I am writing to share the highlights of today's meeting with the Deputy Minister and her staff:

1. The Deputy Minister was asked a series of questions regarding the supply and delivery of PPE. She explained that the products are supplied through the Ministry of Government and Community Services (MGCS) and delivered through a government supply chain. The Deputy Minister assured us that all boards have received enough supplies to allow them to reopen. Some small shipments are still en route but will be completed by the weekend. Nancy Naylor has indicated that they have supplied 31 million items.
2. Questions were raised about the various brands of hand sanitizers that are being purchased and used in school boards. Some of the sanitizers have restrictions for children (i.e. no more than 3 pumps per day) and some are restricted for women who are pregnant or nursing. The Ministry indicated that all products have to be approved by Health Canada and are being provided through the same central process as PPE. A few brand names were shared and the Ministry committed to checking whether they meet the required Health and Safety standards.
3. The Deputy Minister was informed of two eastern boards who have indicated that they will not be enforcing the use of masks on students from Grades 4 through 12. Grave concerns were shared and a discussion about the Hierarchy of Controls and the necessary layered approach to health and safety ensued. The Ministry committed to following up on these situations and reiterated that there are several layers of protection in place to ensure safety and these include distancing, sanitizers, ventilation and masking.
4. The Affiliates shared concerns regarding the morale of teachers and educators who are preparing to return to work. There is a great deal of fear and worry. While the Affiliates are trying to reassure members, they are not able to endorse the plan or say that the unions were part of its creation because that was not the case. The system is not ready to reopen. There has been no coordination between curriculum services and health and safety services. The expectation appears to be that teaching and programming continues as per usual and this is not a safe expectation. Staffing issues are not resolved. Boards have not completed their staffing requirements. The Deputy Minister's response to the concerns raised was that boards are staggering their starts or delaying their starts to address some of these issues. Not many boards are actually opening on the 8th. She stated that while the Ministry can't control COVID cases, they have to be super vigilant about the conditions in schools. They also have to find a way to keep schools open and keep them safe. They know that they will have to adjust in

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some areas and are willing to look at areas where they have some control. The Deputy Minister suggested that a rapid response team could be created to discuss emerging issues, get quick advice from Public Health, if necessary, and provide fast responses to the system. The Ministry is willing to help with issues that are identified early and issues that fall within their control. The Affiliates responded by stating that the Ministry must establish clear standards for the system so that all key players know the rules. The Affiliates have filed an application with the OLRB for this reason. Clear standards are necessary before a response team is introduced. The Deputy Minister committed to taking this away to give it more thought.

5. The Deputy Minister provided an update on other reopening issues. The Ministry is monitoring boards with respect to their reopening plans – Distance Learnings numbers, start times, staggered entry plans. It will take some time for school reorganization issues to settle. The Ministry will have to reinforce outbreak management protocols. They are working very closely with Public Health. Public Health is also working very hard to reach the hiring target for new nurses to assist schools. The Ministry will be watching absences and school board reporting mechanisms for absences. Boards will be required to post COVID positive cases on their website. This will be done in a way to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of individuals. The Ministry is working with Public Health on this and is also working on testing protocols within school communities.
6. The Deputy Minister provided an update on the workgroups. The teacher workgroup is meeting today and will be discussing Remote Learning issues. The instructional support workgroup is also meeting today.

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.