



To: All TDSB Trustees and Senior Staff
Re: In-Person Learning for Special Education Students

From: Elementary Teachers of Toronto; ETFO Toronto Occasionals; OSSTF Occasional Teachers; OSSTF Professional Student Support Personnel; OSSTF Toronto Teachers; Toronto Education Workers

The Ministry of Education recently instructed Boards to provide the opportunity for in-person learning for some special education students as follows:

*“Most students with special education needs will be learning remotely during this period. **In-person learning should be reserved for students that cannot be accommodated through remote learning.**”* (emphasis added)

1. What process was put into place so that, per the Ministry Memo quoted above, most students in special education are indeed having their learning needs met remotely?
2. What process was put into place to assess the needs of students in special education for in-person instruction?

To the best of our knowledge only a general invitation to all parents of special education students that they may select in-person learning if they feel their child’s needs cannot be met through remote learning was issued.

It is our understanding that this has resulted in the opening of over 200 schools in the TDSB, and the requirement of hundreds of teachers, and education workers to return to in-person instruction with hundreds and hundreds of students.

Given the exceptional needs of students in special education programs:

- Many have mask-exemptions;
- Many cannot maintain the required 2-meters physical distance from each other or from their teachers and education support workers;
- Some require physical intervention and/or redirection to de-escalate behaviours; and
- Some have difficulty in avoiding frequent touching of their own mouth and face.

And that this is now occurring in the context of a system-wide lockdown during which:

- COVID-positive cases in Toronto are escalating;
- COVID-positivity rate among elementary-age students is exploding; and
- The new variant of COVID is reportedly even more transmissible than the current virus;

It is our position that the unique needs of students with special education programming combined with the current context of COVID spread, places TDSB workers who are required to return to in-person instruction at a heightened health and safety risk.



It is our understanding that the TDSB has not taken any steps to enhance health and safety protocols for the students or for their teachers and education support staff.

To the best of our knowledge, the Board has not:

- Tested the ventilation in each room to which students and staff have been returned, including reviewing ventilation reports that have been provided to the Joint Health and Safety Committee as required by the Occupational Health and Safety Act;
- Reviewed and adjusted wellness room procedures to ensure the obligation of isolation rooms in each school is met during this period that has fewer overall staff in the building;
- Provided for a process for staff who are newly assigned to work with high needs special education students (Occasional Teachers; Teachers working with combined groups; Reassigned PSSP workers, etc.) to review the specifics of each returning student's Safety Plan and IEP/IPRC provisions before engaging in this assignment; to receive training related to the specifics of Student Safety Plans; to update Student Safety Plans with new measures and procedures as a result of the increased risk of COVID; Provided for the information and training about donning and doffing of PPE;
- Considered a requirement for enhanced PPE and health and safety protocols such as:
 - Providing additional PPE so that each time a person leaves and re-enters their work space they can remove old PPE and don new PPE prior to re-entry;
 - Working with Toronto Public Health to have the additional Public Health Nurses assigned to the congregated sites and sites running DD and ISP programs to meet with staff and students, determine/review issues as they arise and ensure best practices are in place for all;
 - Working with Toronto Public Health and the Provincial Government to ensure deployment of rapid, asymptomatic testing at each school that is running programs during the lockdown;
 - Ensure positive cases are immediately reported to workers and that workers are immediately provided with the Accident/Injury report form and the WSIB Exposure Form; and
 - Enhanced student screening, including temperature checks at the beginning of the day, before re-entry to school.

We believe that had the TDSB consulted with us prior to implementing the Ministry's directive regarding these students, much of this would have been worked out in advance. Unfortunately, that did not happen.

We thank you for your immediate consideration of these matters.

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