

May 28, 2021

Ontario's teacher unions respond to Premier's request for input on school reopening

TORONTO, ON—Yesterday, Premier Ford wrote to healthcare and education stakeholders requesting input into the potential reopening of schools. Today, the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO), Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA), and Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) sent the following response to the Premier:

“Since the beginning of the pandemic, Ontario's teachers and education workers have supported the safe, regional reopening of schools and have repeatedly called on your government to engage with education and public health experts in meaningful dialogue on how to keep schools safe and open to in-person learning across the province. Educators know that in-person learning provides the individual attention and holistic social, emotional, and academic supports necessary to best realize student success and well-being.

While this government has finally recognized the role of schools in COVID-19 transmission and reached out to engage education stakeholders, meaningful dialogue requires more than a 32 hours' notice to respond to questions better suited to those in the medical and public health communities.

Teachers and education workers have repeatedly called on this government to work collaboratively to implement the health and safety measures called for by public health and education experts, including smaller class sizes to allow for proper physical distancing, improved ventilation and air filtration systems in schools, and robust tracing and testing protocols to stop potential outbreaks before they begin. Educators have also pushed this government to ensure that teachers and education workers are prioritized to receive vaccinations.

These measures are necessary to ensure that schools and workplaces are safe for students and staff, and allow for a sustainable return to in-person learning. However, the situation is not the same everywhere in the province and the government must defer to the advice of local medical officers of health regarding what is best for their communities.

Educators once again urge you to convene an advisory table of all education stakeholders to address the health and safety needs of schools and the learning challenges faced by students because of the pandemic.”

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