

January 12, 2022
Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
5th Floor 438 University Ave
Toronto, ON M7A 2A5

Dear Minister Lecce:

I am writing on behalf of the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board of Trustees to express our grave concern, disappointment, and frustration with the recent change in provincial protocols regarding the management of COVID-19 in schools, specifically with the discontinuation of COVID-19 reporting and dismissal of students and staff when a positive case has been identified in the class or cohort, and the total lack of consultation prior to implementing this change.

This is a concern that all trustees are hearing daily from our parents/guardians who are angry, frustrated, and more apprehensive than ever to send their children to school. Our concern is based on numerous factors:

- **No consultation prior to implementation** – there was absolutely no consultation with school boards, trustee associations, unions or directors of education on this significant change in practice. Parents/guardians depend on this information to inform their decisions on whether to send their children to school on any given day.
- **Lack of Transparency** - discontinuation of the established COVID-19 case and contact management system, including public reporting of cases, dismissal of classes and cohorts, to be replaced by the reliance on absences as a possible indicator of COVID cases among students and staff, lacks the transparency of the system that has worked well and maintained public confidence throughout the pandemic.
- **Inequitable Access to Test Kits** - the lack of access to PCR and Rapid Antigen Test Kits is inequitable and disadvantages a significant segment of our community who do not have the means to purchase these items. We request PCR and Rapid Antigen Test Kits be made available to students and staff who have COVID symptoms before they come into the school or workplace.
- **Student Masks** - While school boards have received a supply of non-fit-tested N95 masks for staff, students have only been provided with 3-ply cloth masks that are for optional use. We request that the Province provide medical grade masks or child size N95 masks for all students.
- **Reduced Health and Safety Measures** - reduced health and safety measures, (i.e., eliminating the closure of classrooms or schools based on COVID spread and the combining of classes or cohorts), puts students and staff at greater risk.
- **Inadequate Funding for Ventilation and Air Quality Improvements** - including portable HEPA filter units for every occupied classroom creates an inequitable situation for some staff and students working in classrooms without a stand-alone unit.

- **Lack of Funding for Smaller Class Sizes** - While funding has been provided to support increased staffing, the funding would not support system-wide equitable reduction of class sizes to support physical distancing.

Minister Lecce, when ratepayers, which include our parents and guardians, elect us as trustees, they place in us a trust to care for, and educate their children in a safe, welcoming, and equitable manner, as well as to represent their interests to the best of our abilities. Included in this trust is the belief that trustees will consult with the people they represent and provide them with information so that they may make important decisions about their children's education.

The DPCDSB has a long-standing practice of reaching out to the various stakeholder groups impacted by decisions to inform policy, procedures, and practices. The DPCDSB has the same expectation of our elected provincial government, which includes our Ministry of Education.

We want our classrooms open to welcome students in as safe and healthy manner as we possibly can. And we need to do so with the support and confidence of our parents/guardians and staff. Reverting to the previous case and contact management system, including transparent reporting of known positive COVID-19 cases in schools and sharing this information in accordance with applicable privacy laws with parents/guardians as per the previous established protocol, would go a long way toward regaining the trust of our community.

In this regard, we implore the province, as a first step, to provide access to medical grade masks or N95 masks for all students and education staff as noted above, provide an adequate number of test kits for each student and education staff member to test at home for COVID-19, as well as reconstitute the reporting and management system that was in place and to consult with stakeholders on these and other important matters affecting the health and safety of our students and staff as indicated, moving forward.

The mental health and well-being of staff and students has been and continues to be a significant challenge as we continue to navigate the pandemic. Ensuring measures are in place to support a safe return to in-person learning mitigates the apprehension and anxiety resulting from the recent change to practice.

Thank you for your attention to these important and significant matters.

Sincerely,



Sharon Hobin
Chair of the Board of Trustees

Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board of Trustees

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