



**ONTARIO PUBLIC  
SCHOOL BOARDS'  
ASSOCIATION**

**Leading Education's Advocates**

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Cathy Abraham  
President

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Executive Director

October 28, 2021

The Honourable Stephen Lecce  
Minister of Education

Dear Minister,

I want to thank you for your continued commitment to keeping our students safe and in school this fall. Today's announcement that the government will be providing take-home testing kits for symptomatic students and their contact cohorts, as well as increased testing requirements for unvaccinated staff, is another positive step toward ensuring our schools are as safe as possible.

I'm sure you can agree with us that school reopening has been an overwhelmingly positive experience for the vast majority of schools and classrooms across Ontario. It is clear now that the positive learning and social opportunities for students provided by in-class learning cannot be equaled in a virtual setting for almost all students.

While there have undoubtedly been some challenges, as expected, as a province we can take great pride in our progress towards fully reopening through this recent wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the success and well-being of our students and staff as shared goals, we are pleased with the current downward trend of case numbers. There has been no noticeable uptick from Thanksgiving gatherings, and it's clear that Ontarians are doing their part to abide by the remaining restrictions and help keep students in schools, businesses open, and social activities happening, from movie theatres to children's sports and indoor restaurant dining.

Secondary schools throughout the province are currently operating with a modified semester model to align with both the Ministry of Education and Public Health COVID-19-related guidelines. The modified semester model has proven to be less than optimal for student achievement or student and staff well-being. On behalf of our member boards, we know the time is right to ask for the Ministry of Education, as soon as possible, to permit school boards to make a local decision regarding a return to a normal semestered calendar, with regular cohorts, more normal timetabling, and increased options for vaccinated student participation in extracurriculars and sports.

As we have noted throughout the pandemic, our education system and our school communities benefit tremendously when school boards are provided as much time as possible to plan for and implement any changes to COVID-19-related protocols. Accordingly, our member boards would appreciate a swift decision on this matter. Any decision in this regard would, of course, need to be

supported by the Chief Medical Officer of Health and local public health units, but it is vital to student engagement that we move in this direction soon.

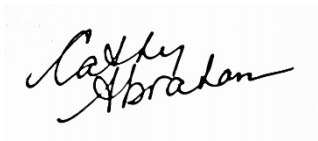
We also know that Health Canada is on the cusp of releasing a decision on the Pfizer vaccine's suitability for five to 11-year-olds. The Ontario Public School Boards' Association stands ready with our member boards to work with the Ministry of Education, Public Health officials, education sector stakeholders, and our school communities to ensure that the implementation of any vaccination process and policy occurs as smoothly as possible. It is clear that we must continue our outreach on the merits of vaccination, and ensure that we are always seeking to eliminate existing barriers to reaching that critical mark of 90% fully vaccinated across the general population.

On the topic of vaccines, we must reiterate our support of adding COVID-19 to the list of designated diseases in *Ontario Regulation 261/13 Designated Diseases* under the *Immunization of School Pupils Act* (ISPA). We encourage the government to move forward on making this important change as soon as possible, while taking into account all of the associated practical realities.

Our Association and its 31 member boards and 10 school authorities will continue to follow appropriate precautions and provincial and local public health guidelines, although we do appreciate that your government has made a commitment to adhering to a regional approach should any further restrictions need to be put in place.

Your timely consideration of our requests is much appreciated and we look forward to hearing from you soon on the matters of semesters and timetabling, vaccination of five to 11-year-olds, and the inclusion of COVID-19 in the *ISPA*.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cathy Abraham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cathy Abraham  
President

CC: Nancy Naylor, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education  
Dasha Androusenkov, Deputy Director, Stakeholder Relations, Ministry of Education