

Friday August 14, 2020

Memorandum To: Chairs of District School Boards
Directors of Education
Secretary Treasurers of School Authorities

From: Stephen Lecce
Minister

Nancy Naylor
Deputy Minister

Subject: Additional Guidance and Funding for School Reopening

Thank you for the planning and preparation you and your teams are doing to support the safe reopening of our schools. Your commitment to Ontario students, families and staff is clear from the meetings we have had with each of your boards and school authorities and from our weekly calls with Chairs and the Council of Directors of Education.

The purpose of this memo is to provide additional information to support you in your school reopening plans and is responsive to key questions we have received.

School Reopening Plan – Guidance

The [Guide to Reopening Ontario's Schools](#) was developed in consultation with medical experts and approved by the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health to support the safe reopening of schools for the 2020-2021 school year.

The provincial guidance has been widely supported and the plan is among the strongest and most progressive plans across jurisdictions in terms of health and safety requirements and government investment to support reopening.

We have received questions about whether school boards can make adaptations to the guidance to meet local needs. We are confirming that the guidance in the document represents a baseline and that school boards are permitted to adopt adaptations that support more physical distancing and other health and safety measures provided that they are within the following parameters:

- In-person classes for elementary school students five days per week;
- Full instructional hours for all students;
- Option for remote learning for all students in the 2020-21 school year;
- Focus on cohorting and limiting student contacts per the guidance memo; and
- Adapted secondary school delivery for designated boards.

Accessing District School Boards' and Isolate Board School Authorities Accumulated Surplus Balances

The ministry will be proposing changes to allow district school boards and isolate board school authorities to access their accumulated surpluses in excess of previously allowed limits.

District school boards and isolate board school authorities would be allowed to incur an in-year deficit up to 2 per cent of their operating allocation, for this year only. This will allow for up to \$496 million to be used to support the safe reopening of schools across the province detailed in Appendix 1.

School boards are being given this additional flexibility for the purpose of augmenting the health and safety of their school reopening plans where they feel it is necessary, in consultation with their local public health unit. Acceptable investments include smaller class sizes and leasing of additional space.

A small number of district school boards with less than 2 per cent of their operating allocation in their accumulated surplus available for use will receive funding for the amounts required to cover these costs that are in excess of their accumulated surplus balances, per their 2019-20 revised estimates, up to 2 per cent of their operating allocation. Further details will be provided to the applicable district school boards on the requirements to access these funds.

Many Ontario school boards have reserves that exceed 2 per cent of their operating budgets. School boards that would like to access their reserves for additional investments in the upcoming school year, related to health and safety, may seek approval from the Minister of Education by providing a business case.

Staggered Start to the School Year

School boards will be permitted to adopt a staggered start to the first week of the school year, such as allowing different grades to return on different days, if boards feel that this would contribute to students learning new routines and for new health and safety practices to be reinforced.

School boards will not need to seek any adjustment to previously approved school calendars should they choose to adopt this approach.

Ventilation in Classrooms

Maintaining air quality in school buildings is one of several risk reduction strategies for reopening schools. The guidance released by the ministry on June 19, 2020, included that, where feasible, school boards should ventilate indoor environments with fresh air,

avoid or reduce the recirculation of air, and ensure recommended maintenance is followed and filters are clean and replaced.

In addition to the \$1.4 billion in School Renewal funding that is currently allocated to school boards, which can be used to address HVAC renewal needs as well as building systems and design to optimize air quality, the ministry will allocate up to \$50 million in additional funding to support immediate measures, including commissioning and calibration of existing systems for maximum efficiency, increased frequency of filter changes and acquisition of HEPA filters, prioritizing classrooms with limited ventilation at this time.

Details of this investment will be released shortly.

Remote Learning

A key element of the provincial school reopening plan is focused on ensuring that parents have the ability to make the best decisions for their children. School boards are currently surveying parents to assess how many families may choose remote learning for part or all of the upcoming school year.

The province will fully fund all student enrolment regardless of whether a student is participating in remote learning or in-school learning.

To support school boards in establishing high quality remote learning for their students, the ministry is making adjustments to the reporting of school board data, including the opportunity to establish a new virtual school using a unique identifier.

The province will also provide funding support in the 2020-21 school year to ensure appropriate school leadership for virtual schools. School boards will receive \$18 million in funding for principals and school administrative support, based on a formula that uses school board 2020-21 projected enrolment, detailed on a board by board basis in Appendix 2.

The ministry is releasing a [Policy/Program Memorandum \(PPM\)](#) on Remote and Synchronous Learning so that parents and students know what to expect when they are participating in remote learning. This PPM will provide a consistent approach across the province to ensure students are fully engaged in their learning. It includes ministry-set requirements on the minimum time for synchronous learning by grade, and protocols for communicating with parents and students and access to technology. The PPM also outlines effective practices such as educator training and technical support.

In the coming weeks, school boards will receive a Transfer Payment Agreement (TPA) for the new Priorities and Partnerships Fund (PPF) investments reflecting this allocation.

Details on Funding for Additional Teaching Staff

On July 30, 2020, the Ontario government announced its school reopening plan for the 2020-21 school year, including investments of \$309 million. These investments included up to \$30 million in new funding to support the hiring of additional teachers.

This funding was originally announced as an application-based process. In light of the imminent start of the school year, the ministry will provide a board-by-board funding allocation. The \$30 million in funding has been allocated based on a combination of elementary projected Average Daily Enrolment (ADE) and historical information on grades 4-8 class sizes. This funding must be used to increase physical distancing within classes in a school board. Each school board's funding allocation is set out in Appendix 2.

School boards with accumulated surpluses of less than 2 per cent of their operating allocation are not eligible for this funding, as they are receiving additional funding to cover costs which are in excess of their accumulated surplus. This funding can be used to support additional teaching staff.

In the coming weeks, school boards will receive a Transfer Payment Agreement (TPA) for the new Priorities and Partnerships Fund (PPF) investments reflecting this allocation.

Notice

Some of the elements and proposals set out in this memo can only take effect if certain regulations are made by the Minister of Education or Lieutenant Governor in Council under the *Education Act* or other legislation as required. Such regulations have not yet been made. Therefore, the content of this memo should be considered to be subject to such regulations, if and when made.

We look forward to continuing to work with all partners to find safe solutions that will bring students back to the education they need and deserve. We are confident that with all partners working together, we can bring our education system back, while putting in place health and safety measures that will protect students, staff, and communities.

We are committed to continuing to review and be responsive to updating guidance based on public health advice. Thank you for your ongoing partnership.

Sincerely,

Stephen Lecce
Minister

Nancy Naylor
Deputy Minister

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