

Friday, April 16, 2021

Subject: In-Person Learning for Students with Special Education Needs Who Cannot be Accommodated

Memorandum to: Chairs of District School Boards
Directors of Education
School Authorities

From: Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education

Nancy Naylor
Deputy Minister

Subject: In-Person Learning for Students with Special Education
Needs Who Cannot be Accommodated Remotely

Preparations are well underway to support our highest needs students for in-person learning after the break. We appreciate your efforts to make sure that the most vulnerable students who cannot participate in remote learning can continue to benefit from routine and consistency in in-class learning, in the context of strong health and safety measures.

As previously communicated, school boards are expected to make provisions for in-person support for students with special education needs who cannot be accommodated through remote learning based on student needs.

Most students with special education needs will be learning remotely during this period. In-person learning should be reserved for students who cannot be accommodated through remote learning.

We are writing with additional information and guidance to support your planning for safe and consistent provision of in-person learning. This guidance applies for the duration of the school closure period.

Vaccination

Education staff who provide direct support to students with complex special education needs and meet the criteria outlined in the Ministry of Education April 8, 2021 (attached) memorandum regarding COVID-19 vaccine updates, are eligible to register for vaccination appointments province-wide.

School boards are to keep a record of the special education staff that have received letters confirming their eligibility to register for a vaccination appointment and will provide the relevant union or teachers federation with the list of members' names who have received an eligibility letter so that the union or teachers federation can handle inquiries, member questions about the process and related matters.

Planning for Student Return

As noted above, most students with special education needs will be learning remotely during this period. School boards should seek the input and advice of special education staff working with students in determining which students with special education needs cannot be accommodated through remote learning and thus require in-person supports based on the students' strengths and needs.

The input and advice of special education staff working with students should also be sought to develop strategies to support students with special education needs who face difficulty maintaining physical distancing and are unable to wear masks for medical reasons. It is expected that these will be relatively rare cases.

School boards should limit the number of special education staff on site to those needed in order to support students with special education needs who cannot be accommodated through remote learning. Exceptions include, but are not limited to, staff that are required to attend on-site to support remote learning. School boards are also encouraged to have discussions at the local level on other measures and protocols as appropriate, such as any enhanced cleaning standards.

The funding in the GSN and the COVID-19 supports are unchanged as a result of the current closure and are available to support and maintain current staffing.

In order to encourage the quick and efficient resolution of matters that may arise during the school closure period, school boards should appoint a designated person/s to communicate with the relevant union regarding special education in-person learning.

Please carefully review the Ministry of Education February 23, 2021 memorandum (attached) regarding student masking and personal protective equipment, and school board masking exception policies, to ensure that students are supported to wear masks to the greatest extent possible. If the standard ear-loop-type masks cannot be worn, principals may discuss with parents/guardians, in consultation with the student's healthcare provider, whether other types of face coverings might work for the student. Students in grades 1 to 12 are required to bring and wear their own appropriate masks, with a back up supply provided by the school board if needed.

We encourage you to share resources with parents on supporting children in wearing masks and on health and safety practices for children who cannot wear masks. See for example [information](#) from the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario. Local public health units may have additional resources and advice.

COVID-19 School Screening and Access to Asymptomatic Testing

Daily on-site confirmation of self-screening for elementary students shall be implemented during this remote-learning period for in-person learners.

School boards are to provide elementary students and parents/families with an accessible copy of the [COVID-19 school and child care screener](#) to perform daily self-screening of students prior to or upon their arrival to school. The COVID-19 school and child care screener is available in PDF format and parents/families are also able to print their results directly from the online interactive webpage or email results.

Consistent with direction since February 2021, all elementary and secondary staff and all secondary students are required to conduct on-site confirmation of self-screening prior to or upon their arrival to school.

In addition to on-site screening, the Ministry of Education has rolled out weekly province-wide asymptomatic testing. This testing program includes using less invasive methods where possible.

Asymptomatic testing is available through mobile testing opportunities at the school, in hub sites and at select pharmacies. School boards and schools are promoting weekly asymptomatic testing opportunities and the information is posted on a provincial website.

Other Health and Safety Measures

School boards are expected to continue to adhere to ministry health and safety expectations and any additional requirements put in place by their local public health unit. Some elements that may be particularly relevant to these settings are highlighted below.

As much distancing as possible between students, between students and staff and between staff members should always be promoted and other distancing measures to be implemented as appropriate.

Air quality/ventilation should be optimized in rooms being used for special education classes within the context of the school facilities and related building systems, including manufacturer recommendations.

Depending on each individual situation, measures could include, but are not limited to: opening windows where safe to do so, running ventilation systems for longer hours before and after occupancy, upgrading air filters to the highest possible MERV and using standalone/portable HEPA filtration units.

American Society for Testing Materials (ASTM) level 2 masks and eye protection shall be provided to special education staff providing in person support for students with special education needs who cannot be accommodated through remote learning. A minimum of ASTM level 1 masks and eye protection will be provided to all other staff. Other PPE, such as gloves and gowns, shall continue to be provided to staff, as appropriate.

Special education staff who are performing an aerosol generating medical procedure (AGMP), or are required to be within two (2) meters when an AGMP is being performed, are to be provided with and use fit-tested N95 respirators during the AGMP.

Thank you for your commitment to support students who require in-person learning during this period.

Sincerely,

Stephen Lecce
Minister

Nancy Naylor
Deputy Minister