



ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION

Leading Education's Advocates

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Cathy Abraham
President

W.R. (Rusty) Hick
Executive Director

December 14, 2021

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education

Dear Minister,

As we approach the winter break, Ontario is in the midst of another wave of increased COVID-19 cases, due in large part to the emergence of the Omicron variant. Despite the hard work and dedication of our staff and students in adhering to public health recommendations, it appears that we are beginning to see significant increases in cases among those who attend and work in our schools. It should be noted that public health officials, including Dr. Moore, appear to be of the opinion that – in the vast majority of circumstances – our schools remain safe places for our students to learn in-person. However, we are writing to you today with a few requests that we feel will help ensure that our schools are able to remain as safe as possible while we navigate the latest challenges of the ongoing pandemic.

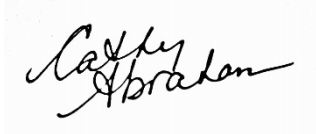
Increasingly, studies are indicating that the best way to halt the spread of the Omicron variant is through the administration of a third dose or booster shot. We appreciate and support that thus far the province's approach has been to allow early access to the booster shot to vulnerable segments of the population. With that said, **we would like to ask that as soon as possible, you consider allowing education workers under the age of 50 to access their third vaccine dose.** Children aged five to 11 are now eligible to be vaccinated, however it will still be some time before their vaccination levels reach optimal levels. As you know, many boards across the province are facing increasing staffing challenges, due in part to the requirement of staff to isolate in instances of possible close contact. As we have noted in previous correspondence, these issues are of particular concern for all staff who work closely with students with complex medical needs.

In addition to vaccination, testing is one of the key pillars in keeping our schools safe and open to in-person learning in the coming months. Ensuring that our school communities have easy access to rapid antigen screening kits must be a priority. That is why we have been so pleased with the government's decision to provide rapid antigen screening kits to all students attending publicly funded schools in Ontario, to be used over the holiday break. In order to further limit any instances of COVID-19 exposure in our schools, **we are asking that you consider providing rapid antigen screening kits to all in-school education workers as well.** We must do everything we can to keep our schools open for in-person learning in the coming months.

Finally, **we must once again 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.

We feel strongly that the measures we have raised above will provide us with the best chance at ensuring our schools are as safe as they can be, and that they would be the last to close and the first to re-open in the case of any further pandemic-related restrictions. We appreciate that this is a rapidly evolving situation with new information emerging almost daily, but ask for your timely consideration of these measures.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cathy Abraham". The signature is written in a cursive style with a light grey background behind it.

Cathy Abraham
President

CC: The Honourable Christine Elliott, Minister of Health
Nancy Naylor, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education
Dasha Androusenkov, Deputy Director, Stakeholder Relations, Ministry of Education