



*Office of the Chair of the Board*

14 January 2022

The Honourable Stephen Lecce  
Minister of Education  
438 University Ave, 5th Floor  
Toronto, Ontario  
M7A 1N3

Dear Minister Lecce:

At our Committee of the Whole meeting on 11 January 2022, trustees of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board asked me to share a number of specific requests relating to the reopening of our schools to in-person learning next week. While we appreciate the updated guidance and information in your memorandum of 12 January 2022, our greatest concerns remain unaddressed.

First among these is the need for **continued tracking and public reporting of confirmed and suspected COVID-19 cases in schools by local Public Health Units**. Reporting rates of absenteeism is an imprecise and inadequate proxy for understanding the prevalence of Covid-19 cases in schools. An article in today's *Toronto Star*, by Isabel Teonio, entitled "Thousands of students are 'no shows' after forced switch to remote learning," illustrated the wide range of reasons currently being offered for student absences, the vast majority of which do not reference illness. Families should not have to rely on uninformative absence reports or on community rumour to determine whether or not a child may have been exposed to COVID-19 infection at school, or whether the risk of exposure to COVID-19 at a school exceeds their family risk tolerance in light of other family members who have unique vulnerabilities to the virus.

Tracking and reporting the incidence of COVID-19 cases associated with schools requires the availability of tests. Students and staff must have **access to PCR testing in instances of high-risk exposure and suspected COVID-19**. In addition, our schools need continued funding for and supplies of **rapid antigen tests for all students and staff, in support of implementing a "Test to Return" strategy** following COVID-19 illness or exposure. The PCR tests should be available to asymptomatic individuals with high-risk exposure as well as to symptomatic individuals with suspected COVID-19 infections.

We appreciate your decision to provide non-fit-tested N95 masks as an optional alternative to medical masks for school staff, but we believe that **medical masks and non-fit-tested N95 masks should also be provided and funded as an option for students**. In addition, it is imperative that any provided masks come in a full range of sizes to ensure optimum effectiveness for both children and adults.

As we and other school boards have requested previously, we would like to see a **long-term commitment to adequate funding for upgrades to school ventilation systems**, beyond providing additional portable HEPA filter units, in the interests of the long-term protection of the health of students and staff. We welcome any increases to funding for vital school facility improvements, but at this time, replacing outdated HVAC systems and retrofitting schools built before mechanical ventilation systems were commonplace must be highlighted as significant needs.

Finally, we would appreciate **confirmation that additional funding will be provided to cover any COVID-related expenses that cannot be funded through current planned budgets**. While the Grants for Student Needs for 2021-2022 included some additional funding, the Omicron variant has created new budget pressures.

Sincerely,



Lynn Scott  
Chair, Ottawa-Carleton District School Board

cc: Dr. Vera Etches, Medical Officer of Health, Ottawa Public Health  
Cathy Abraham, President, OPSBA  
W.R. (Rusty) Hick, Executive Director, OPSBA  
T.J Goertz, Senior Communication and Policy Officer  
OPSBA and All English Public Chairs  
Trustees, Ottawa-Carleton District School Board  
Senior Staff, Ottawa-Carleton District School Board  
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