

Ministry of Education

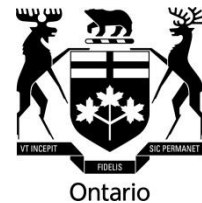
Minister

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Ministère de l'Éducation

Ministre

315, rue Front Ouest
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April 28, 2020

Dear Parents—

I sincerely hope that you, your children, and your families are staying safe and healthy during this unprecedented time.

Over these past weeks, our government has been inspired by you and your children's eagerness and flexibility in transitioning toward remote learning. We know that this has not been easy, especially with the profound impact COVID-19 has had on your lives and livelihood. The ability to keep our students engaged in their learning journey has been remarkable.

As the Ontario Minister of Education, I am committed to keeping you informed about new developments regarding the impacts of COVID-19, especially when it comes to child care, early learning programs and the status of the current school year. Our government will continue to support you and your children during this difficult period.

Our government's foremost priority is the safety and well-being of every child and every student, and those who nurture and support them. In considering any options for welcoming students back to an in-class model of learning, our decisions will be based on safety, consistency and the guidance of public health officials. We have been clear and unwavering in our commitment to ensure every measure is taken to protect students' health and safety before re-entering a classroom.

With that principle in mind, our government has ordered that all public schools in the province will remain closed to students until at least May 31, 2020.

The expert advice of Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health and the COVID-19 Command Table informed our decision. While the modelling that public health experts recently presented shows we are making progress, we are not at a stage in our fight against COVID-19 where students can safely and confidently return to their classrooms.

I know this news is frustrating for many of you. The compassion and commitment of Ontario's parents have been constant. Since we first announced the suspension of in-person learning on March 12, we have heard from parents across the province on how they are doing their best to encourage continued learning with their children. Parents and families have been an incredible source of comfort as children react uniquely to this global outbreak.

Since the beginning of school closures, our plan for the continuity of learning has evolved significantly and successfully. Most recently, we reintroduced teacher-led learning in the province and students are now being assigned work and resources for continuing their education.

As part of this plan, we have outlined expectations for student work-time in a given week based on learning materials and work assigned by your child's teacher. I want to emphasize that no student will have their graduation jeopardized by the current outbreak.

Our government has set out the following minimum suggested standard for instruction:

- Kindergarten to Grade 3: Five hours of work per student per week, with a focus on literacy and math;
- Grades 4 to 6: Five hours of work per week, with a focus on literacy, math, science, and social studies;
- Grades 7 to 8: 10 hours of work per week, with a focus on math, literacy, science and social studies; and,
- Grades 9 to 12: Three hours of work per course per week for semestered students, and 1.5 hours of work per course per week for non-semestered students, with a focus on credit accumulation and graduation.

While it is understandable that there are going to be differences in educational experience during this period, my expectation is that all students will be supported and engaged by their teachers and other education workers. We want to thank educators who have embraced these unusual circumstances to ensure their students continue having every opportunity to excel and achieve their potential. If you have concerns related to the sufficiency of the assigned work or the need for enhanced contact, you are encouraged to reach out to your principal or school board. We want to do everything we can during this outbreak to ensure our students receive a quality learning experience.

To maximize the instructional time for your children, we are converting remaining Professional Activity (PA) and examination days into instructional time. This would ensure that your children remain engaged and learning for the greatest number of days possible during this school year. Perhaps now more than ever, every bit of instructional time matters even if it means just one or two days.

While we try to facilitate instructional time during the school closure period, one of the challenges many families experience is that, even in our digitally-connected age, some students do not have access to the Internet or the technology to access [Learn at Home](#).

I'm pleased to inform you that the Government of Ontario is working with Rogers Communications and Apple to help meet the educational needs of students and families during the COVID-19 outbreak. To date, over 21,000 iPad devices, pre-equipped with free Rogers LTE wireless data have been purchased and distributed to families in need by

school boards, with the over \$75 million provided by the provincial government through the Grants for Student Needs. In addition, Apple is providing on-going support in French and English to teachers, parents and students, with a collection of resources to support learning and working from home. These 21,000 delivered devices are in addition to the over 200,000 computers and tablets that school boards have provided to students in need during this period.

Rogers is also working with Ontario school boards to provide high-speed, low-cost Internet to subsidized tenants and members of housing partners across Ontario through its [Connected for Success](#) program, as well as the Government of Canada [Connecting Families](#) initiative.

Partnerships like this – between school boards and tech firms like Rogers Communications and Apple – truly showcase the spirit of Ontario.

While we remain committed to meeting students' needs in the current school year, our government has already started planning for the 2020-2021 school year. While this school year was certainly unlike anything we have seen before, we need to prepare ourselves for the fact that school may not look or feel the same come September.

With the safety and well-being of your children as our guiding principle, let me assure you that schools, child care centres, and school buses will be required to undergo thorough deep cleaning before being ready to welcome students and early learners back into their physical spaces. Despite the extremely minimal contact risk posed after this length of closure, we want to allow every student to feel safe and confident as they return to school.

In terms of instruction, we will be unveiling our proposed plan for an expanded summer learning program that will enable students to continue their learning through the summer, if desired. While over 100,000 students typically participate in summer learning, we know that many more students may wish to continue their teacher-led learning after this school year formally ends. This proposed plan for expanded summer learning would focus on credit recovery, a new option to upgrade courses, and a focus on gap-closing programs and supports for vulnerable students.

Our government understands that the COVID-19 outbreak has resulted in unsettling times for children. We must continue to pay close attention to the emotional and mental health needs of all students, even if there are no immediate signs of distress.

To that end, our government has directed school boards to ensure mental health workers and professional staff engage with students immediately, as needed, in a secure and safe conversation. We want you to know there are many organizations that provide critical support for children facing mental health concerns or distress. For example, [Kids Help Phone](#) offers 24/7 counselling and referral services across the province. To use this free resource, children can call [1-800-668-6868](tel:1-800-668-6868), or text CONNECT to 686868.

Child care centres and EarlyON Child and Family Programs continue to be closed until at least May 6, 2020. I can assure you the health and safety of your children will be paramount as we make decisions about re-opening and we support Ontario's outbreak response and recovery plan.

I want to express my appreciation to the teachers and education workers who have been adapting to these new circumstances and doing their best to deliver learning and supports for our students. While we cannot guarantee what the "new normal" will look like in our child care and education systems, I promise you; no decision will be made that does not answer "yes" to the following question: does this promote the health, safety, and well-being of our children and students?

There is simply no question — and no answer — more important.

Stay safe,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Lecce". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and a long, sweeping underline.

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education