

The state of Education and the health of students/teachers during the Pandemic:

The Key Issues and needs, as of fall 2020 to current 2021

- I. Class size
 - Elementary classrooms need to be lowered to 15 as were high school
 - In hotspot areas, some classes as high as 32 students, allows for no spacing between desks, K classes still have up to 29, gr. 1 - 3 have up to 23, 24.5 in junior but those are averages
 - Lecce lied on the news talking about classes of 15, not happening in elementary!
 - 2m distance impossible to keep
- II. PPE and cleaning:
 - With new variants, teachers unions asking for higher quality masks, some promised in recent return, to be seen whether they become widely available
 - Enhanced and more frequent cleaning required including more cleaning staff; very, very few schools got extra caretaking staff (nothing new added to fall education budget for this), most teachers report “no extra cleaning at their school”.
 - Poor ventilation systems, my union person states, there have been a few improvements around the province, “ you can’t leave windows open in winter”, T. Morrison.
 - ETFO has repeatedly written and asked the Minister of Education for air purification units and carbon monoxide testers in all classroom, so far no response to this
 - Dr. Fisman, Epidemiologist, U of T, stated in fall report need for HEPA filters and CO2 monitors to ensure good ventilation
- III. Masks:
 - Only progress is current order for all elementary students to wear masks all day
 - Not addressing crowded lunchrooms where students eat and chat with their peers
- IV. Special Needs students, support staff & ASD classrooms:
 - Stayed open thru the lockdown with no special or extra funding for equipment or COVID testing, staff working with special needs students are as nurses and doctors, frontline, right up close, for care needs, why aren’t these staff being offered early vaccine just as longterm care staff?

- Teachers online have expressed fears, report contact with saliva, note many special students who can't or won't wear a mask

V. Inequity Issues:

- Rural vs. urban access to technology/internet
- Neighbourhoods where more essential workers live, have greater need to send children to school, have the fullest classrooms and most spread of COVID
- When online schooling offered last year, the Boards did their best to find out who didn't have technology and gave away many Chrome books, ipads etc, until they had no more to give out, but still some homes sharing one device
- Only now, the province is offering more tech money, way too late
- Reports that some homes have 4 - 5 children online sharing a device or a device and one laptop, and in some cases they don't have the wifi speeds for all kids to be online, yet the government insisted on synchronous learning this January, where kids had to be online most of the day, 235 min. school (Usual day 300 min)
- Those families who can support their children online with resources and tech help will manage better through this pandemic and come out more competent afterwards

VI. Testing:

- Since September 2020, there have been a total of 7,398 lab-confirmed positive cases of COVID-19 in Ontario schools, CTV News, Feb. 1st
- Teachers unions asking since last fall for regular and asymptomatic testing in schools, and just now Feb. 8th the province says they will begin to use the 3 million dollars that they Federal government had given them last year for schools, why so last, how long will it take to get such testing staff hired and implemented?
- Lecce promises asymptomatic testing in the school with the re-entry in February, but no specific dates, timeline or framework for this was provided. As of Feb. 9th, the local Halton Public Health web page still says they have "no plans for asymptomatic testing at this time"

VII. Teacher training for online teaching?

- Very limited was provided, a few hour module, last August, only on how to use new platforms like google classroom
- Most learning as they go after hours searching online for resources, and asking more other teachers to share ideas
- Why were no extra support teacher hired to help with tech issues?
- Teachers' time online is even greater than the kids and they are suffering stress and headaches

- During a stress-filled year, this government introduced a new math curriculum with no training time, or workshops as no one could gather or had time to create supports for teachers
- Online learning is a whole new way of teaching, i.e. you can't set up hands-on activities or inquiry learning centres online very well or use many of the resources you have developed over the years

VIII. Other stressors for teachers:

- those who had to teach in January from home and have their home children home all day, very stressed, can't help their own kids as they teach and monitor 22- 25 online
- government didn't make emergency daycare available for all teachers with young ones, and teachers have had to ask for grandparents for support in some cases where daycares had closed
- having to have a private place to teach from home, set up with adequate technology, no additional funds provided if personal computer older or outdated, no tax relief for teachers creating their own tech lab from home, some chose virtual in fall but others definitely dislike it
- some teachers live in areas with poor or limited internet, or high charges for internet in rural areas yet no offer to help fund these additional costs
- teachers report effects from long hours on computer and being upset about leaving their own children unattended on technology during recent lockdown
- stresses for teachers living with health issues, of a partner with compromised health, (yet they are teaching in person), or concerns for their own older parents, who may live with them or be near them to assist in childcare
- teachers completed report cards (February, elementary) as professionally as possible, but it was challenging as some students submitted no work, or only one piece of work for a whole term; other students have not been seen, or are rarely on the livestream class meets. Some subjects like dance or drama, could not really be observed or evaluated and were difficult to grade yet principals expected grade marks for these. No flexibility offered to teachers, despite the unusual situation of online teaching.

Two recent published Media blurbs from ETFO, the local for Elementary teachers:

Government must fund and implement necessary safety measures to avoid future school closures

Feb. 3, 2021

Toronto, ON – The Ford government’s plan to reopen schools in Ontario without adequate layers of protection in place risks future closures and a possible third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. To safely reopen schools, and to keep them open, which is everyone’s goal, the province must prioritize safety over political grandstanding.

“With new variants spreading in Ontario, the Ministry of Education must take urgent action to fund additional safety measures in schools, and they must provide school boards and Public Health Units (PHUs) sufficient time to implement them effectively,” says Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (ETFO) President Sam Hammond. “The Ford government has not invested any new provincial money since August. They must stop taking credit for federal funding and invest now to avoid contributing to a third wave.”

“ETFO and others have said this on numerous occasions, but it is worth repeating since it takes the government so long to listen. While the measures they have finally put in place will help, they are not sufficient. Schools still need smaller classes, mandatory masking for Kindergarten, and CO2 monitors and portable air purification units in every classroom,” adds Hammond.

Critical investments should have and could have happened last summer. “After repeated urging from medical professionals and education partners, it took the Ministry over five months to mandate masking in grades 1 to 3 and to make asymptomatic testing available across the province. Ontarians deserve more than press conferences and false announcements; they deserve decisive action that unequivocally protects students, educators, their families and the community,” says Hammond.

The Ford government’s wait-and-see approach to managing the pandemic has left school boards and PHUs scrambling to ensure safety measures are in place in the hardest hit areas of Ontario in under two weeks—something we all know is impossible. Notes Hammond, “What we’re seeing is yet another instance of the Ministry downloading the real work of keeping students and staff safe to those who are already overburdened by this government’s failure to manage the spread of COVID-19.”

ETFO represents 83,000 elementary public school teachers, occasional teachers and education professionals across the province. Its Building Better Schools education agenda can be viewed at [BuildingBetterSchools.ca](https://www.buildingbetterschools.ca).

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Ontario budget provides no new funding to keep students and educators safe

November 5, 2020

Toronto, ON – Today’s Ontario budget delivered no new funding to ensure students have safe schools and the education supports they need.

“School boards and educators went into this school year with a chaotic, underfunded return to school plan from the Ontario government and this budget has done nothing to change that situation,” said ETFO President Sam Hammond. “Ford and Education Minister Lecce have abandoned parents and educators who are left to ensure that students have what they need under extremely challenging conditions.”

“Our schools need more teachers to keep students and staff safe through smaller face-to-face classes and to ensure students are getting the best instruction possible by limiting the size of virtual learning classrooms.”

“The COVID pandemic has exposed many other issues that require this government’s urgent attention. There are schools that need repairs and better ventilation, students need mental health supports and funds are needed to support Special Education and English language learners (ELL).”

The Ford government’s expenditures for education and child care have represented only 1.3 per cent of Ontario’s response to COVID-19 to date. Based on this budget’s projections for the next two years, this will not change.

“Parents have consistently said they want smaller classes and this government isn’t listening. The government must rethink its approach to public education and invest appropriately in the education and future of our students,” added Hammond.

“The investment of seven million dollars over three years to produce online elementary educational content for elementary grades pales in comparison to what is really needed to ensure students are getting the quality public education they need from teachers via face-to-face and virtual classes.”

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