

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## **Time for the Ford government to step up for education**

TORONTO, ON—The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) calls on the Minister of Education, Stephen Lecce, and the entire Ford government to shift schools to remote learning immediately, at the very least in areas where school-related COVID-19 case counts have increased significantly over the past 14 days.

“For Stephen Lecce to insist that schools remain open to in-person learning this week as recent school-related cases of COVID have hit upwards of 40 per cent of schools in hot spot areas of the province is mind-boggling and unconscionable,” said OSSTF/FEESO President Harvey Bischof.

“Meanwhile, the Ford government sits on thousands of doses of the COVID vaccine that could be offered to many front line workers, including teachers and education workers, in areas where COVID cases are spiking. Doing so would help keep school buildings open for in-person learning and reduce the spread of the virus,” continued Bischof.

Medical experts point out that cases of COVID-19 continue to find their way into schools, and the government is currently reporting the highest number of school-related cases and school closures due to COVID-19 outbreaks since the start of the school year. It's high time that Minister Lecce stopped promoting the fiction that schools are immune to the spread of the virus.

OSSTF/FEESO calls on the Ford government and Minister of Education Stephen Lecce to step up for education in Ontario and to:

- Immediately move to virtual learning in areas of the province showing increased levels of community and school-related COVID-19 cases
- Offer vaccinations to education workers and teachers immediately in areas of high COVID-19 case counts and allow the vaccinations to take effect before returning to in-person learning; continue to prioritize education workers and teachers in other areas of the province
- Provide immediate increased funding to improve ventilation in school buildings and enhanced personal protective equipment for staff, and provide funding to reduce class sizes and for more supports for students
- Legislate paid sick days for workers in the province to help stop the spread of COVID-19

“Teachers and education workers in Ontario schools have provided learning opportunities and services to students under very difficult circumstances exacerbated by poor decisions by the Minister of Education and the Progressive Conservative government. It is time that this government steps up for everyone in the education community,” concluded Bischof.

*OSSTF/FEESO, founded in 1919, has over 60,000 members across Ontario. They include public high school teachers, occasional teachers, educational assistants, continuing education teachers and instructors, early childhood educators, psychologists, secretaries, speech-language pathologists, social workers, plant support personnel, university support staff, and many others in education.*

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