

MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release: Thursday, February 4, 2021

The hidden traps in Education Minister Lecce's decision-making

Once again, Education Minister Stephen Lecce has failed to address or respond to the whereabouts of the benchmarks and metrics his government has used to trigger the full return to face-to-face learning in Ontario's schools. Instead, he continues to talk in circles while delivering nothing but empty promises about health and safety measures for our school communities, promises made without any evidence of a rollout plan. Families, teachers, and education workers are tired of interpreting convoluted political doublespeak that is vague and meaningless. Without proof of improvements to safety protocols in schools, face-to-face learning continues with little understanding of how COVID-19 can spread indoors.

"I am disappointed that there have been no meaningful details provided to the public about what specific 'enhanced safety measures' will be in place, how they will be operationalized, and when they will begin," states Dr. Amy Greer, Canada Research Chair in Population Disease Modeling and Associate Professor at the University of Guelph. "This is especially frustrating when many students and education staff have already returned to in-person learning with few of these 'enhanced safety measures' being implemented."

OSSTF/FEESO President, Harvey Bischof, adds that, "Education workers, teachers, parents, and students remain unsurprised at this government's ad-hoc approach to decision-making. Again, people in Ontario are caught in uncertainty and chaos thanks to meaningless promises from Minister Lecce. The safety of our communities, students, and staff must be prioritized with a clear and well-implemented plan that improves COVID-19 safety protocols and protections. Classrooms and school buildings look the same as they did in September, the same as they did before the holiday break, the same as they did last week."

A fulsome safe return to in-person learning plan would incorporate provincial standards for,

- keeping infectious individuals out of school settings;
- providing access to families for paid sick leave and/or financial supports for families to reduce the burden on families to encourage compliance;
- smaller class sizes to ensure physical distancing is maintained;
- methods for improving ventilation;
- procedures for expanding in-school asymptomatic testing;
- benchmarks that regions, families, teachers, and education workers can rely on to inform school re-openings and closures.

This government's vague assertions and inability to produce a clear plan to keep schools safe create unnecessary obstacles and challenges for families, teachers, and education workers in Ontario. "In order to prioritize a return to in-person learning while minimizing risks to students and staff, we need to escalate in-school mitigation measures," concluded Greer.

This government continues to take us down a rabbit hole with little detail relating to how and when they will be implementing their “plan” despite the fact that many students in the province have been back to school for weeks.

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.

Contact: Jennifer Seif
Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation
Jennifer.Seif@osstf.ca
416-751-8300 x 221