

OSSTF/FEESO statement on province-wide shutdown announcement, closure of schools

December 22, 2020 - Yesterday, Premier Ford announced province-wide restrictions to come into effect on December 26. Once again, despite this announcement's significant impact on Ontario's publicly funded school system, there was no prior consultation with organizations representing frontline educators. This will lead to unnecessary flaws in implementation that could have been addressed in advance, and could have led to better decisions made in the best interests of Ontario students.

The Premier's statements were riddled with contradictions that simply create confusion for the public, for educators, for parents and students. While it has been acknowledged that the test positivity rate for 14 to 17 year olds is the highest for any demographic, the claim was made that schools are not a source of COVID-19 spread. Yet, while claiming that schools are not a problem with regard to COVID-19, they are being shut down for three weeks or longer. It is impossible to reconcile these competing assertions.

Although the Ford government is appropriately providing emergency childcare for many essential frontline workers, it has left educators out in the cold. While educators are clearly providing a critical service to the province, and while Minister Lecce has imposed various stipulations on the amount of time they must spend providing live, synchronous instruction, no thought appears to have been given to those teachers and education workers who have their own children at home during the school closure period. This simply continues a pattern of disrespect for educators that we have seen since this government took office. Despite the government's disregard for the realities of the classroom, and despite giving teachers and education workers virtually no time to prepare for this shift to full virtual education, our members will continue to do their utmost to provide the best learning environment possible for the students they serve.

If there is any positive, albeit unintended, consequence, it is that, for the closure period, educators will not be expected to engage in the unsustainable and pedagogically impoverished hybrid model of education by which they are expected to provide instruction online and face-to-face simultaneously. The ability to focus on one mode of curriculum delivery will at least mitigate some of the difficulties that, for many students, accompany emergency online learning. Sadly, the government has not adequately mitigated the fact that many students and families do not have access to the technology or reliable internet connections that would allow access to online learning. This demonstrates a clear failure on the part of the Ford government to address the inequities created by relying solely upon online learning solutions for students.

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