



Update for April 9th, 2021

Well, here's attempt #2 at putting this update together. I had it all typed up and ready to program into the email software to send out this morning then jumped on an online meeting that lasted for almost 2 hours last night and when I went back to it - POOF! Gone. Needless to say there was a cloud of obscenities that is still hovering over my head....

Laura Walton, our OSBCU President was part of a press conference along with other education union leaders on Wednesday morning. The fact that OSBCU was invited to participate shows that we've come a long way by being recognized as important to the operation of the education system. You can find a link to watch the video here - <https://youtu.be/vgmvtWyHHb0>

As of right now, there is no clear indication about Hamilton Public Health (headed up by Dr. Richardson) considering using Section 22 in order to put Hamilton schools into a virtual learning scenario. Obviously, based on the work we do it's beneficial for our members for education to happen in person, but the safety of our members must be priority number one. This weekend, I'll be taking some time to draft a letter to Dr. Richardson and encouraging her to make the best decision possible based on medical facts when considering to force schools into virtual learning. For now, unless there is an announcement sometime next week, we should all expect that our co-workers and students will return April 19th after the spring break.

There's some disturbing facts surrounding the spread of the Covid variants that our members need to be aware of. There is a concern that even when masked, variants are finding ways to spread and masks may not be good enough protection. Public Health officials are not sharing black and white memos about concerns, but across the province I'm hearing about local leaders having conversations with officials sharing concerns verbally. We have eyewear PPE available to us in the form of face shields and/or goggles. Please consider if you are performing disinfection of symptomatic students desk areas or isolation rooms through the day or will be within 6 feet of any staff or students that you wear eye protection as that has been identified as one possible way the variant can be spread is droplets entering your system through the eyes. This is by no means a scare tactic, but just a piece of information that I wanted to share so that individuals can make their own decisions and take precautions they feel necessary to protect themselves as best as possible.

While I was on an OSBCU President's call Wednesday night, Laura shared that she had just received a Ministry of Education memo clarifying some of the information shared by the government at press conferences over the last few days. I've attached the memo for you to read with this email and will be sending a letter to senior

managers at the HWDSB later today regarding the work our members should be doing next week to comply with the enhanced cleaning portion of the memo that all boards should be doing during the spring break.

Please check your eBase calendars for your locations and make sure you are aware of any childcare rentals you might have in your building next week. Touchpoint cleaning will need to be done for those programs and more importantly, be aware of the areas included on their rental permit. Any use of rooms or areas not included on the permit should be communicated to your FOS immediately so they can stop the practice and deal with the issue.

If you are taking some time off to stay home and relax next week - congratulations! You deserve the break and I hope you can rest up and come back refreshed. For those of us not taking time off - remember the important role you play in keeping our schools safe. The value we bring to the education system cannot be understated.

Stay safe, stay healthy.

Blake

Memorandum to:	Chairs of District School Boards Directors of Education School Authorities
From:	Stephen Lecce Minister of Education Nancy Naylor Deputy Minister of Education
Subject:	Ministry of Education Updates and April Break Health and Safety Reminder

Thank you for your continued efforts in upholding public health and safety measures that have ensured schools remain open and safe, and which Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health has said are fundamental to keeping schools safe and students learning alongside their peers in their classrooms.

Keeping schools open is critical to the mental health and well-being of Ontario youth. During the emergency shutdown, schools will remain open for in-person learning with strict safety measures in place, except in those regions where local public health units have directed schools in their areas to pivot to remote learning. As outlined by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, implementing a provincewide shutdown is needed to bring the third wave of this pandemic under control so that we can save lives, keep our education system open and allow our vaccination program to take hold.

The upcoming April 12th-16th break will continue as scheduled, but with enhanced safety protocols to further protect schools, including:

- Vaccine roll-out to begin for eligible education staff in hot spots, and staff who support students with complex special education needs across the province
- Asymptomatic testing expansion
- On-site confirmation of self-screening
- Refresher training upon return from break
- Outdoor instruction
- Enhanced cleaning during the break
- Curriculum-linked activities for students
- Letter to parents promoting best practices for a safe April break

The Ministry recognizes the spring break will be an opportunity for staff and students to rest and recharge during this unprecedented year. As we prepare for this break, and within the context of this time-limited government action, it is important to continue adhering to and communicating the importance of health and safety measures, leading into and during the break, as well as when returning to school.

Education staff vaccination

We are pleased to share that, beginning the week of April 12th-16th, education workers will be eligible to register for vaccination. This includes education workers who provide direct support to students with special education needs across the province, and all education workers in select hot spot areas, beginning with Toronto and Peel, then rolling out to priority neighborhoods in other hot spot regions including York, Ottawa, Hamilton, Halton and Durham. This will be followed by a rollout across the province as supply allows. There will be specific instructions and information shared in short order. This incremental step will continue safeguarding staff and students, and the Province will roll this out as quickly as supply allows.

Asymptomatic testing expansion

The ministry will also work with school boards and testing partners to continue to offer targeted testing in schools to support the safe return to in-person learning after the break, through a variety of testing approaches.

For the week of April 12th-18th, pharmacies that offer testing and assessment centres across the province will accept appointments from students and education staff for asymptomatic testing. The Ministry of Education will be working with school boards to offer school-based clinics. Parents are encouraged to take advantage of this testing capacity to have their children tested to support a safe return to school on April 19th. Children attending child care, and child care staff, will also be eligible to access this testing.

Through this approach, asymptomatic testing will be available to all school communities in the province during the break week.

On-site confirmation of self-screening

As you are aware, on-site confirmation of self-screening is mandatory for all school staff and secondary students. On the return date of April 19th, all school boards and schools, including elementary schools, will be expected to use on-site confirmation of self-screening for all students. This additional step will help ensure that students with symptoms do not enter schools.

Refresher training upon return from break

When school reopens on April 19th, boards should ensure that staff are prepared to provide students with a refresher on health and safety measures on the first day of class. The ministry will be releasing a health and safety webinar that staff can voluntarily review over the break. Further information will be provided to boards on when educators can access the webinar in the “Supports for Virtual Learning” eCommunity in the ministry’s Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). In addition, attached is an educator guide that focuses on COVID-19 safety protocols, including hand hygiene, physical distancing and proper masking. The guide includes developmentally appropriate classroom activities and discussion questions for engaging students in refreshing their learning about health and safety protocols. These protocols, developed in concurrence with leading health advice, have kept schools safe to date. By refreshing our memories on them as we return to the class, we can ensure they continue to keep schools safe.

Outdoor instruction

As the weather becomes warmer across much of the province, the possibility of outdoor learning opportunities should be considered by boards and schools. We know that many boards facilitated outdoor learning arrangements during the fall, and we hope that this experience can be expanded in situations where it is safe and weather-permitting to do so.

Enhanced cleaning during the break

Based on discussions with school boards, we know that a large number of school boards are planning on undertaking enhanced cleaning of their schools during the spring break. We ask that all school boards use the break to undertake enhanced cleaning so that all students and staff have the assurance of returning to a safe learning environment. Guidance regarding school cleaning standards and best-practices is outlined in the [Guide to reopening Ontario’s schools](#).

We are directing schools to continue to provide access to their on-site child care centres for those programs permitted to operate over the spring break.

Daily case reporting over the break

During the spring break, school boards and local schools will not be required to complete daily reporting through the ministry’s absence reporting tool. Data collected on April 9th will be reported on April 12th on Ontario.ca. Absence reporting will resume on April 19th, 2021. Although no daily reporting is required to the Ministry during this period, we understand that local public health units (PHUs) may still require contact with schools and school boards during this period to support contact tracing, if necessary. We ask that you work with your local PHUs to have a plan in place to address

this unique period, and to continue to leverage existing local PHU resources and partnerships, including with school focused nurses, to support the return to school following the break.

Curriculum-linked activities for students

Boards are also encouraged to remind parents and students about the Grades 1-8 supplemental, curriculum-linked activities they can access during the April break at [TVO Learn](#) and [TFO IDÉLLO, apprendre à la maison](#). These opportunities allow students to reinforce learning. Given the disruption to learning that some students are facing this year, school boards should remind parents and students about the extra-curricular learning supports and programs that exist for their use.

Secondary students can continue to access [TVO's Independent Learning Centre \(ILC\) Open House](#) and [Portes ouvertes pour les cours TVO ILC in French-language](#). [Mathify](#) (English) and [Eureka!](#) (French) are also available to provide one-on-one online tutoring services for elementary and secondary students. [Mathify](#) covers online math tutoring in English for Grades 6 to 10 and [Eureka!](#) supports all subjects for French-language students in Grades 1 to 12.

Letter to parents

To support this period, the Ministry has developed a template letter to be sent to parents, to encourage everyone to adhere to COVID-19 health and safety measures within their community over the spring break. We encourage you to communicate this information to your school communities, including staff, students and families prior to and upon return from the break.

By following public health advice, we can all have a safe and restorative spring break, and ensure classes return safely post break.

Thank you again for all your efforts to keep Ontario schools safe and open. Together we can help to keep ourselves and our communities safe and healthy.

Sincerely,

Stephen Lecce	Nancy Naylor
Minister	Deputy Minister