

August 13, 2020

Ontario's return to school plan fails to meet legal health and safety requirements - Education unions

TORONTO – Ontario's four major education unions have requested an immediate meeting with the Minister of Labour and representatives from the Ministry of Education, contending that the government's "Guide to Re-Opening Ontario's Schools" fails to meet the requirements set out in the *Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act*.

The Guide "does not take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances to protect teachers and education workers as is required by Section 25(2)(h) of the *Act*", according to a letter sent today to the Ministries by the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO), the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO). They represent more than 190,000 teachers and education workers who are expected to return to school in September under the government's plan.

The unions contend that there is an absence of scientific consensus or certainty on significant aspects of COVID-19. Given that, Ontario is obliged under the *Act* to follow the precautionary principle and implement all reasonable measures necessary to reduce the risks that COVID-19 poses to health and safety.

"By reopening schools without measures to appropriately address critical issues, the Ministry of Education has placed the health and safety of educators, their students and the entire school community in significant and imminent danger," states the letter, which can be viewed [here](#).

The Ministry's guide to reopening has failed to provide adequate health and safety protections including: limiting class size to allow for necessary physical distancing; setting out minimal measurable standards for ventilation in schools; providing a mask requirement for children under age 10; providing adequate screening for students; and providing adequate safeguards for student bus transportation. The plan also fails to adopt the concept of cohorting in a manner consistent with current research, particularly by allowing cohorts of up to 100 students at the secondary level.

The letter requests that a meeting with government officials, representatives of public, Catholic, French school board associations and the Ministry of Labour's health and safety inspectorate be held no later than Friday, August 21.

-30-

For more information, please contact any of the following media relations representatives:

AEFO – Marilynne Guevremont at 613-850-6410, or via email at mguevremont@aefo.on.ca

ETFO – Valerie Dugale at 416-948-0195, or via email at vdugale@etfo.org

OECTA – Adam Lemieux at 416-925-2493, ext. 507, or via email at a.lemieux@catholicteachers.ca

OSSTF/FEESO – Paul Kossta at 416-751-8300, ext. 225, or via email at Paul.Kossta@osstf.ca