

December 16, 2021

Teachers and Education Workers Need Rapid Tests to Slow the Spread of Omicron

TORONTO, ON – Today, the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO), Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA), and Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) are issuing the following statement in support of school boards providing teachers and education workers with rapid tests for COVID-19 to make schools safer for students and their families:

While school boards are providing students with rapid tests to use over the holidays, teachers and education workers have been excluded from this important preventative health and safety measure. By failing to provide these tests to educational staff, teachers and education workers have once again been pushed to the end of the line when it comes to safety precautions in their workplaces.

It is known that the majority of COVID-19 infection spread is from asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic individuals, and proactive rapid testing is an effective method of detecting those cases.

To successfully combat COVID-19, everyone in all school environments should have equal access to rapid tests. It is the responsibility of school boards and the provincial government to facilitate all COVID-19 prevention efforts to ensure test availability, including rapid testing.

Cases of COVID-19 are currently rising in Ontario and are projected to continue to rise after the holidays. The government should immediately provide tests to all school staff and move beyond its current in-school rapid testing pilot project to fund regular asymptomatic testing in schools across the province.

Since the pandemic began, education unions have been calling for a robust testing and tracing system. Such a program must also be accompanied by other measures called for by education and public health experts, including smaller class sizes to increase physical distancing, improved ventilation, masking for all staff and students, and adequate PPE for all staff.

-30-

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

AEFO—Marilyne Guevremont at 613-850-6410 or mquevremont@aefo.on.ca

CUPE—Mary Unan, at 647-390-9839, or via email at munan@cupe.ca

ETFO—Meagan Perry at 416-962-3836 ext. 2329 or mperry@etfo.org

OECTA—Michelle Despault at 416-925-2493, ext. 509 or m.despault@catholicteachers.ca

OSSTF/FEESO—Paul Kossta at 416-751-8300 or paul.kossta@osstf.ca