

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 8, 2021

STATEMENT

OSBCU responds to government's extension of virtual learning in Ontario schools

Laura Walton, president of CUPE's Ontario School Board Council of Unions (OSBCU) released the following statement in response to the Ontario government extending virtual learning:

"The last-minute announcement to extend virtual learning betrays lack of planning by the government, which has yet to formulate a safe back-to-school plan despite being nearly a year into the pandemic.

Back in July, we had [laid out a fully-costed plan](#) for in-person learning, which included smaller class sizes and social distancing measures, additional staff and resources to sanitize classrooms as well as cater to students' mental health needs.

Although the government is now basing its decision to postpone in-person learning on recent data showing high rates of COVID positivity among young children, the Ministry of Education had previously downplayed the risks of transmission in school children.

Moreover, despite these risks, the government has also yet to mandate universal masking for students, a directive which is sorely needed to ensure the safety of students and workers.

The exemption for special needs staff

The learning requirements of some special needs students cannot easily be managed online, and thus the role of EAs and other frontline educators who will continue to go into physical classrooms is essential. They are providing a vital service to parents and to our society. But they must have safer working conditions – they require enhanced PPE (such as N95s and full gowns) and better ventilated classrooms. We would also emphasize that many special needs students can be accommodated with virtual learning and that Boards have to ensure that only those that absolutely require in person instruction are getting that instruction, thus limiting the number of people required to attend the brick and mortar school.

Emergency Child Care

The government needs to extend accessibility of emergency child care services to include education workers. This is desperately needed for those going into physical classrooms, but also for those educating virtually. Like all parents, educators with children are struggling to work remotely while also facilitating online learning for their own children."

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