



Statement – Return to School in 2022

January 1, 2022

The Ontario Principals' Council (OPC), representing over 5,400 principals and vice-principals in Ontario's public elementary and secondary schools, supports the plan of the government and public health officials to have staff and students return to in-school instruction in 2022, if it can be managed safely.

We have always advocated that in-person learning is the most ideal for students, and we will continue to work relentlessly to ensure we can provide safe learning environments for students and staff. But we also must follow the advice provided by the medical and scientific communities to ensure we are implementing the most up-to-date measures, based on science.

To safely welcome students and staff back to school, the following measures must be taken:

- The government must address the staffing shortage that has been ongoing since September. Schools can only remain open if there are enough staff to safely teach and supervise students. It cannot be the sole responsibility of schools and/or boards to address this challenge.
- All staff must have access to adequate PPE when in schools and around students, including rapid antigen tests when they have come in contact with infected cases.
- Priority access must be provided to all school staff to receive their third dose/booster shot against the virus.
- Priority access must be provided to all students – especially those who are 5-11 years old – to receive their immunization.
- All staff should be vaccinated, unless there is a medical or human rights reason for them not to do so.
- Resources must be available to schools and boards so they can ensure the safety precautions that the government has said it wants in place, including adequate N95 masks and HEPA filters in all rooms.
- While the ministry has indicated that schools will no longer be required to report COVID-19 cases, principals still have a legal responsibility under the *Education Act* to report the existence of any communicable disease, and to refuse admission to school of any person infected with a communicable disease. This contradiction must be addressed so that principals are not in jeopardy of violating their responsibilities.
- We appreciate the enhanced safety measures that will be put in place over the next several days. For those schools that are to return on January 3, all principals and vice-principals should be allowed to work remotely until students return to school on

January 5, unless there are specific tasks they need to perform in school. In those cases, those school leaders should then have immediate access to PPE N95 masks.

We look forward to welcoming students and staff back to school. The OPC has and remains available to consult with the government to provide proactive input and advice, based on our experience as front line leaders. Principals and vice-principals have already taken on numerous additional tasks during the pandemic and we remain willing to go above and beyond. But we must ensure we have the staff, resources and conditions necessary to safely do so.