



Association des directions  
et directions adjointes des  
écoles franco-ontariennes



CATHOLIC  
PRINCIPALS'  
COUNCIL | ONTARIO



## Statement – Return to School for January 17th

Issued: January 12, 2022

Principals and vice-principals in Ontario, represented by l'Association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes, Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario and the Ontario Principals' Council, recognize the importance of in-person learning for students in Kindergarten to Grade 12. We want students back to school, because we know face-to-face learning is preferable to emergency remote learning. We will continue to work relentlessly to ensure we can provide safe learning environments for students and staff.

The government intends for all students to return to in-person learning as of January 17. That is also our goal. To do so we must bear in mind the realities of the precipitous increase and nature of COVID-19 cases, especially the Omicron variant.

- Staff absences remain our most crucial concern. Not only is it likely that more school staff will become infected, but staff will also be required to stay home if they are exposed to a family member or close contact of someone who becomes infected or is symptomatic. We need clear plans about how to manage these daily – and often last minute – absences and direction about when classes or schools need to close because of staff shortages.
- Schools/boards need access to a reliable supply of rapid and/or PCR tests for both students and staff, and reasonably proximate drop-off locations, both to try to minimize staff and student absences and to reduce the spread of COVID-19 within these essential learning spaces.
- Systemic inequities such as staffing shortages, lack of access to appropriate PPE, other safety measures and technology will result in a further marginalization of already underserved groups.
- Lunch time poses a particular risk in schools, as many students eat in the same enclosed space, in close proximity, without masks.
- We appreciate the arrival of N95 masks for staff in many boards across the province. Clear and consistent instructions from public health officials about the proper use of these masks, such as how often they can be used and when they should be discarded, have not yet been provided across the province.
- Principals have a legal responsibility under s. 265(1) (k) and (l) of the *Education Act* to report their suspicion of the existence of any communicable disease within the school, and to refuse admission to school of any person infected with a communicable disease

following receipt of notice from a Public Health Unit. With reduced testing capacity and reporting requirements, direction is required about what evidence should activate the principal's duty to report under this section.

- While priority access is now being provided to all school staff to receive vaccinations against the virus, priority access should also be given to all students, especially those who are 5-11 years old.

We look forward to welcoming students and staff back to school. In an effort to do so as safely as possible, these issues, particularly staff absences, need to be addressed immediately.