

Memorandum To: Chairs of District School Boards
Directors of Education
School Authorities
Executive Director, Provincial and Demonstration Schools

From: Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education

Nancy Naylor
Deputy Minister

First and foremost, we would like to thank you for your ongoing leadership and commitment to support students and school communities during this uncertain time.

Our province is facing a public health emergency with the COVID-19 outbreak and new measures continue to be introduced in an effort to put the health and well-being of Ontarians first. Ontario's education system is now focussed on how to support student learning in this unprecedented time.

We are writing to advise that Minister Lecce signed a new school closure order extending to May 1. This order would allow schools to open for staff on Friday May 1 and for students on Monday May 4. This closure order provides a planning horizon for the coming weeks for all education leaders and partners, and most importantly, for students and families.

We would like to emphasize that this decision will be re-evaluated based on public health advice as these dates become closer. The closure may be extended if necessary to protect the health and safety of students, families and staff.

The government expects that every student will continue to learn while in-school classes are suspended. Given the range of circumstances of students and their families, the continuity of learning will require a range of delivery options that are reasonable and practical. Teaching and learning in this evolving context will not look the same as the customary in-class experience.

Our shared goal is to ensure the successful completion of the school year for all students, and to support students to advance to the next school year, earn credits and to graduate.

The ministry is sharing this Provincial Guidance Document to provide direction to school boards on implementing continuity of learning.

The key elements outlined below should be used by school boards to guide their implementation of the ministry's direction on continuity of learning.

Key elements

Schools boards should work collaboratively with their senior teams, principals and vice-principals, teacher federations and education worker unions in implementing continuity of learning.

School boards, with their teachers and other staff, should contact their students as soon as possible to assess how best to establish ongoing contact between the student and their teacher(s).

Boards are encouraged to use the provincially licenced Virtual Learning Environment, Brightspace, which is freely available to all school boards in the province, or other education platforms that may be in use in individual boards. Boards should immediately begin identifying and supporting other forms of teacher-student connectivity,

including telephone contact, contact by mail and the delivery of printed curriculum packages, based on the specific needs of students.

Boards should assess the range of teacher readiness to use online tools and software and to make professional development on the use of these tools available and a priority for their teachers. The ministry has created a rich suite of professional development resources on the use of Brightspace.

School boards should re-establish teacher-led learning by grade groupings as outlined in the following table. The suggested hours of work per student per week is provided as a minimum guideline, as are the suggested areas of curriculum focus.

| Grade Range | |
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| K-Grade 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 5 hours of work per student per week ● Focus: Literacy and math |
| Grades 4-6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 5 hours of work per student per week ● Focus: Literacy and math + science and social studies |
| Grades 7-8 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 10 hours of work per student per week ● Focus: Core math, literacy, science and social studies |
| Grades 9-12 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 3 hours of work per course per week for semestered students; 1.5 hours of work per course per week for non-semestered students ● Focus: Achieving credits/completion/graduation |
| <p>Hours refer to the approximate amount of time <u>students</u> would spend on the work assigned by teachers. Teacher work would include preparation of assigned work and providing feedback or assessment. Teacher engagement with students is expected but would vary depending on circumstances and could include a range of ways that teachers would connect with their students.</p> <p>Teacher teams, including specialist teachers, may be used to develop assigned work for students, including in subjects such as art, music, French as a Second Language and Physical Activity, and to contribute to board identified resources for learning at home.</p> <p>Students with special education needs should receive appropriate accommodations where necessary and be provided with assigned work by teachers, as well as feedback or assessment. Modifications to reflect a student's IPRC and IEP are encouraged and expected.</p> | |

For elementary students, teachers will use formative assessment approaches to gather evidence of how students are progressing in their learning. It is expected that teachers will provide feedback to their students on their progress.

Secondary students will be assigned learning tasks, projects and culminating activities that will be marked by their teachers for purposes of formative and summative evaluation. Teachers will communicate results of these marked assignments to students. Results will be used by teachers to inform students' final course marks.

School boards should issue final report cards, including the Kindergarten Communication of Learning, for all students. The requirement to issue mid-year report cards for non-graduating secondary students is suspended for this school year.

Graduating Students

A priority will be placed on students scheduled to graduate this year and any student on track to graduate will be supported to graduate. Teachers of graduating students will be expected to provide marks for graduating students by April 23rd on work completed by that time, in order to meet admission requirements for post-secondary education. Final report cards with marks will also be issued. Discussions are being held with colleges and universities about the adaptations required to support the admission process for students applying for post-secondary education, and further information will be provided.

We want to be clear: graduating students should not have their graduation or progression impacted by the developments surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. We are working in close cooperation with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities and sector stakeholders to ensure no student's graduation or transition to post-secondary is jeopardized as a result of the school closure period.

The graduation requirement to complete 40 hours of community involvement is suspended for this school year. Community involvement hours that have been completed should be reported on the report cards of graduating students. Graduating students should be encouraged to complete their hours wherever possible, where the health and safety of the student can be assured. Boards should encourage specific volunteer initiatives for students that support communities' response to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as letter-writing campaigns to seniors.

Access to Technology

Both teachers and students may have uneven access to devices and the internet. The equity of access to technology and learning resources is the utmost priority for the ministry, and we continue to explore opportunities and mechanisms for ensuring all students can benefit from Ontario's robust online learning capabilities.

We know that strategies for expanding access to technology have already formed part of board planning. We thank boards for their initiative in expediting the access to resources for their students. If available, boards must enable distribution of laptops or devices from schools to students, while observing public health direction. Where boards do not have existing technology for students, we expect boards to leverage community partners in linking technology to students who do not have at-home access.

Boards must continue to support the privacy of student information and follow best practices in preserving cyber security.

Based on consultation with local public health, boards will allow teachers to re-enter their schools to retrieve laptops and curriculum materials and personal effects. The protocol for school access should ensure the health and safety of all school board staff as well as the public.

Parent Engagement

During this unprecedented period of school closure, we know that parents are facing anxiety about their child's learning and academic progression. The ministry recognizes the incredible support and initiative that parents have undertaken over the last weeks to continue their child's learning journey, such as through supporting the use of the Learn At Home website.

Recognizing the primary role that parents play in their child's education, we expect teachers, support workers, and board staff to remain in regular contact with parents during this period, as needed. As we proceed into unprecedented territory, the importance of open lines of communication between parents and education staff is critical.

The ministry will be working with school boards to support communication to parents throughout this period.

Support for Students with Special Education Needs

We know that this period of school closure is challenging for Ontario's students, including students with special education needs. The ministry is committed to supporting school boards in the provision of supports for students with special education needs.

The ministry encourages school boards to leverage the capacity of professional, para-professional staff and Educational Assistants remotely where possible and within the context of applicable privacy legislation. The purpose of this is to support learning and continued access to the curriculum for students with special education needs. School boards are encouraged to consider how these professionals can work remotely to provide consultation and other supports to teachers and/or families where appropriate.

Mental Health and Professional Supports for Students

The ministry recognizes that this period of disruption can be challenging for students, especially from the standpoint of mental health and well-being. While parents and adults across the province are experiencing considerable concern about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, we must also remember that for our younger students, this period of uncertainty can cause great anxiety.

During this period of school closure, boards must continue to ensure that mental health workers, para-professionals, and other professional staff remain available to students to support them during this difficult time. Recognizing the importance of privacy and sensitivity of many of these discussions, boards must provide safe and secure options for students to directly engage with these professionals on an as-needed basis. As students face increasing mental health challenges during this pandemic, it is vitally important that mental health professionals continue fulfilling their critical role.

In addition to existing ministry funding to boards, the ministry is proud to support a number of mental health resources and initiatives that we encourage students to use, such as Kids Help Phone, which provides 24/7 access to counselling and information. Students can call 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868.

Co-operative Education

Cooperative Education is a highly immersive form of experiential learning and plays a key role in programs such as Specialist High Skills Majors (SHSM) and the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP). For students who are enrolled in Cooperative Education courses which involve a classroom component and a community placement component, their in-person community placements will need to be suspended. These students can work with their co-op teachers to modify their co-op Learning Plans so that they may work through the curriculum expectations. Where feasible, these learners should be provided with opportunities to connect virtually with industry partners on career exploration activities, and experiential learning opportunities.

The SHSM program has an override request process already in place. Graduating students in the SHSM program unable to complete their SHSM requirements due to extenuating circumstances, including the impacts from COVID-19, will be supported through the override request process.

Broader Environment

The ministry recognizes that the broader environment for board planning may include requests for support from community partners, and health partners. Boards should support to the greatest degree possible any health partner or community request for assistance, and to confer with the ministry if flexibility from existing policies is required to enable this.

Ministry Supports

The ministry is prepared to work collaboratively with boards on their continuity of learning implementation and to respond to any requests that would address key challenges. The ministry has been working with the vendor for Brightspace and can work to enable supports and training as needed and identified by boards.

The ministry is also ready to assist with adapted learning materials and supports from the Provincial and Demonstration Schools and AERO for students who may benefit.

The ministry will continue to work with school boards to consider any request for supports or adjustments to provincial policies that are appropriate for the conditions in place for the remainder of the school year.

The provincial guidance provided in this memo may be adapted or augmented in future to reflect the rapidly evolving circumstances and any issues or solutions that may emerge.

Thank you once again for your efforts to work together, share information and ensure that Ontario's education system is providing a coordinated response in the best interest of students. We are committed to continuing our important work together.

Sincerely,

Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education

Nancy Naylor
Deputy Minister

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President, Association franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholiques (AFOCSC)
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