

## Statement by the Ontario Principals' Council Reopening of Schools August 13, 2020

On July 31, the Ontario Principals' Council released a statement regarding school reopening plans for September 2020. In that release, we outlined a number of factors that schools will need to safely reopen. Since that time, principals and vice-principals have been actively engaged in school reopening planning in our schools for the coming year. As a result of this work, there are additional concerns that we believe the government needs to address immediately, to ensure that students, parents, staff and administrators feel comfortable returning to school.

- 1. Class Sizes that Support Physical Distancing** – The medical community, including experts the government has relied on throughout this pandemic, has emphasized the necessity for physical distancing of at least 2 metres between people. Seven hospitals released a statement on August 5 stating that physical distancing and class sizes need to be in place for a safe return to class, to maximize the mitigation of risk.

We recommend that all classes (including elementary and secondary schools in non-designated boards) be limited to a class size that ensures a minimum of 2 metres of physical distancing between students and staff, recognizing the physical class space available.

In addition, due to the age and behavioural needs of our youngest students, all Kindergarten classes should be capped at 15 students.

- 2. Delayed Start to the School Year**

It has become clear that the one professional development day being mandated by the ministry designated for health and safety will not be sufficient to ensure that the reopening of school plans are implemented in a manner that is as safe as possible. Principals, vice-principals, teachers and support staff need additional time for training (PPE, outbreak management procedures, tracing protocols), implementation protocols (ensuring students and staff can safely move throughout the school while maintaining physical distancing) and re-scheduling timetables (to accommodate online learning, re-classified classrooms and/or teachers being moved to a new grade or subject area).

In particular, administrators will face an extraordinary number of contacts with students and staff each day and will be working in an unprecedented new environment. Time is needed to determine if additional safety measures are needed, such as plexiglass in offices.

School leaders want to support the safest possible environment to reopen schools, which will require the adequate time to learn, train, plan and implement the numerous issues that this unprecedented pandemic has brought about, issues that no school has ever had to deal with before.

We recommend that the start of the 2020 school year be delayed for all students until September 14.

- 3. Stagger the Start of the School Year**

Bringing every student back to school on the same day will be problematic. Having a full complement of students in the school on day one will not allow the opportunity to test the new systems, ensure new protocols are working, review health and safety practices, resolve issues that may not have been anticipated and practice new systems that are being put in place.

A staggered entry is currently used in all Junior Kindergarten and some Grade 9 classes to ensure students understand and comfortably integrate into a new environment. This practice would be an effective way to welcome students back to a new normal in our schools.

Following the delayed start, we recommend that students be staggered back into schools over the course of the week of September 14-18.

- 4. Expedited Testing**

If there are any potential positive COVID-19 cases in a school, we cannot afford to wait for days to confirm the result of the test, as this will put the entire school community at risk.

We recommend that resources be put in place to ensure any student or staff member who may have developed the virus be tested and receive their results back on an expedited basis.