

ETFO cautious about new government measures ahead of return to in-person learning

For Immediate Release – January 12, 2022

TORONTO, ON – Today, Minister of Education Stephen Lecce announced new “layers of protection” that will be introduced prior to the return to in-person learning on January 17. The Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (ETFO) is cautious about the province’s new safety measures, and calls on the Ford government to respond to concerns that remain unaddressed, including:

- the government’s failure to reinstate monitoring and reporting of COVID-19 cases/outbreaks in schools, and communication with close contacts and families;
- the absence of a robust testing program that includes PCR testing for students and school staff;
- the low vaccination rate for five- to 11-year-olds. School-based clinics may help with access to vaccines, but do little to address vaccine hesitancy;
- the need for a concrete plan to address the anticipated increase in staff absences due to COVID-related illness and/or isolation; and
- the ability of education workers to receive their boosters this week given how late the decision came to prioritize them.

To safely return to in-person learning, and to provide the greatest level of protection to Ontario’s students, teachers, other education workers, and communities, ETFO continues to call on the Ford government to:

- mandate masks for all students and education workers;
- ensure everyone working in or attending a school who can be safely vaccinated is vaccinated, and those who are unvaccinated are being tested per Ministry guidance;
- improve ventilation and install HEPA filters in all classrooms and public/shared spaces in schools;
- reduce class sizes to promote physical distancing;
- implement robust testing and contact tracing programs;
- return to monitoring and reporting COVID-19 cases/outbreaks in schools, and ensure school communities are made aware of these cases/outbreaks, especially individuals who are close contacts;
- implement a sustainable plan to address an anticipated increase in staff absences due to COVID-related illness and/or isolation; and
- expand the paid sick leave program immediately.

-30-

Media contact: Carla Pereira, ETFO Media Relations, at 416-576-9074 or cpereira@etfo.org