

Important ETFO Update #4: Responding to COVID-19

April 7, 2020

In update #4 on COVID-19 related issues, you will find information related to: picking up materials from classrooms; use of personal equipment; visual online meetings; recording videos of book readings; concerns regarding parents recording and more.

Stay informed at etfo.ca/link/covid19

The information in this newsletter is up to date to the best of our ability and current as of 10:00 a.m. on April 7, 2020. With the situation rapidly changing, ETFO will continue to provide weekly updates on our response to COVID-19.

Keep reading, stay safe, and please wash your hands!

Frequently Asked Questions

I feel that I am being pressured to attend my school and pick up materials from my classroom. Must I comply?

Members are not required to attend their school location and should not feel pressured to do so if they do not feel comfortable. Some school boards are providing opportunities to enter the school building and pick up materials to assist in planning and delivering continuous learning or to pick up personal items. Some members may feel comfortable doing so and it is entirely voluntary. In such cases, great care must be taken to maintain physical distancing and adhere to all recommended measures to impede the spread of COVID-19. Members who have travelled out of country within the past 14 days and are required to self-isolate or those with precarious health will be unable to enter the work site.

I know that ETFO has said that using my own devices is inadvisable but I feel like I don't really have an alternative. What do I need to ensure is in place if I am using my equipment?

The use of personal devices for work is usually discouraged by ETFO; however, if a member chooses to use their devices, it is essential to connect to the school or school

district's VPN and ensure that the device has been updated with all of the security maintenance needed to prevent cyber-attacks.

Despite it being a personal device, a member is using it as a work tool during work time. Employer networks may be designed to monitor unacceptable or inappropriate use of their resources, so members must continue to adhere to the acceptable use policy.

Please note that when a member's personal device is connected to the employer's network, their personal information may be accessible by the employer.

Some school boards are recommending calling each family to reach out directly. Should members decide to do this, there are possible risks involved. Using a personal device is in no way a normal or recommended course of action. Given the extraordinary times we are living through, we must continue to rely on our professional judgement to guide our conduct. Should members choose to use their personal device, they must take all precautions to protect their privacy including their phone number and this is done by dialing * 6 7 before entering the destination number. The caller identification on most cell phones can also be turned off. Check settings or call the cell provider to understand more.

Additionally, the Ministry has advised ETFO that it is working with internet service providers to ensure that no additional data charges and other fees will be personally incurred. ETFO will keep members advised of these developments and outcomes. With these cautions in mind, each member must decide how best to proceed.

My principal is insisting we have visual online meetings with students. Do I have to comply? I'm worried they will be recorded.

The Ministry Guidance Document on continuous learning does not require or recommend synchronous learning sessions for students or visual contact with individual students. Student learning does not have to be through visual contact. Students may have their own issues that prevent them from being available at designated times during the day to make visual contact. Implementation of continuous learning must rely on members' professional judgement and technical skills. If a member has a concern about this issue, they can reach out to their local union office for assistance.

Can I record and share videos of myself reading books for students?

Members should exercise caution any time they wish to post photos or videos of themselves online. Please see the latest PRS Matters Bulletin [Volume 108](#) that outlines many considerations for members as they navigate distance teaching and learning.

Members can access a [list](#) of Canadian authors, illustrators and publishers who are currently granting permission for their work to be read and recorded by educators for students. The list is being updated regularly. By searching by publisher, members can review a list of authors and illustrators who are participating in this initiative.

[Access the Read Aloud Canadian Books and Publishers](#)

Also at the [Access Copyright website](#), members can find more information on the process to follow for those wanting to share online recordings of themselves reading to students, including timelines for how long the recording can be kept and posted and how the book should be introduced on any recording.

If I choose to engage online with my students, would it be wise to record a Google Meet to have it in my files for “just in case”. Would this add a level of security?

It is fair to be concerned about what takes place in a virtual classroom and how it might be perceived. Wherever possible, members should ensure communication with students is done in a group setting rather than individually. Think of how to keep the “virtual classroom door” open while continuing to instruct students. Understand that a virtual classroom may have many ears listening, including parents and guardians.

There may be many interpretations of what is being taught and potentially some room for misinterpretations. Having a prepared plan for a lesson that is followed and kept as a record would be prudent. Taking notes as questions or new issues arise online and keeping notes of responses is also an option. Members may find that they are freer to do this while online than they would be in a live classroom setting.

When it comes to recording students, there is a host of issues.

Recordings of students cannot occur without the consent of their parents. They cannot occur outside of compliance with relevant board policies. The recording is considered the personal information of the student so keeping the recordings creates issues around security of storage, length of storage, notice to parents upon destruction of the records as well as board policies on collection, retention and destruction of personal information etc.

There are also many issues about the purpose of the recording, who will have access to it and how it may end up being used or shared. Will administrators seek to use it for performance appraisal? To impose discipline or otherwise? In many respects, recording the classroom might be compared to instituting surveillance and that is not something typically embraced in classroom settings.

Remember that, even if a member is not recording the meeting, the meeting is not necessarily private. Without a member’s knowledge, it may be recorded by another person, such as someone in the student’s home (irrespective of whether they are allowed to do it or not).

In addition, an individual board may have digital policies that involve some degree of monitoring of their staff’s online activity. Members’ online activity must remain professional at all times.

Is it safe to mail materials to students to make learning more accessible?

With the support of the board or your school administrator, mailing student packages is permissible during this time. All of the necessary safety precautions should be taken if you are directly mailing information to your students.

How do we support students and families that have limited access to technology during this time of distance learning?

In some areas of Ontario, access to cell towers, proper technology devices and high-speed WIFI can be problematic in supporting distance learning for students, parents and caregivers, and for educators. Although not a new issue, the lack of access highlights socio-economic class and regional disparities.

Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, a federal institution, reported, along with several other studies, that only 37% of rural households had access to high-speed internet (50/10 Mbps), compared with 97% of urban households. Further, the data indicated that only 24% of Indigenous communities have access to internet that meet the basic distance learning requirements for internet access.

For more background information on internet access and use, [read the report on High-Speed Access for All: Canada's Connectivity Strategy](#).

Class disparities also widen this access gap where there are single parents and caregivers and/or parents and caregivers that are working with full time employment but not earning a living wage and cannot offer the support required for their children to complete their learning online. Additionally, some households have multiple members sharing one device. These issues of inequity are not exclusive to the COVID-19 crisis but are exacerbated but the urgent need for internet and requirements of continuous learning.

The Ministry of Education is aware of these technology gaps and is devising strategies to address these issues. As the province moves into distance learning, and as we learn about students and families who may not have the technology and virtual access required, it is vital that members continue to provide advocacy and support to marginalized communities. Members should contact administrators and school boards to ask the questions and problem-solve for optimal technology to enable all students to succeed.

Resources and Financial Support Links

[Apply for the Provincial Child Benefit](#). Eligible parents will receive \$200 for children up to 12 and \$250 for children with special needs up to age 21.

[Apply for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit Program](#)



[Learn more about the CERB at etfo.ca/link/FAQ-CERB](https://etfo.ca/link/FAQ-CERB)

[COVID-19 Self-assessment Tools](#) tool to determine what steps you should take should you exhibit symptoms.

For updates, please check ETFO's dedicate page at etfo.ca/link/covid19