

# Important ETFO Update #9: Responding to COVID-19

June 22, 2020

In Update #9 on COVID-19 related issues, you will find information related to the government's plans for reopening schools including: safety precautions at schools and for members; classroom planning; assessment; education worker roles; students with special needs; device and connectivity issues; and member child care.

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

Stay informed at [etfo.ca/link/covid19](https://etfo.ca/link/covid19)

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What safety precautions will school boards put in place before schools re-open?

Advice and input from public health experts need to continue to inform any decisions the government makes regarding how public education will operate over the summer and in the fall. This may include but not be limited to:

- Securing sufficient supplies including personal protective equipment (PPE), barriers, soap/sanitizer, cleaning and disinfectant products and signage before reopening;
- Ensuring adequate ventilation in each room;
- Creating inventories of handwashing sinks with warm water to ensure adequate numbers and the possible need for portable handwashing sinks and hand sanitizer dispensers;
- Assessing square footage of each room and hallways and providing this to staff in advance to assist with planning;
- Determining physical distancing challenges and solutions;
- Reviewing custodial staffing requirements based on cleaning and disinfecting protocols;
- Reviewing correct cleaning and disinfecting procedures;
- Reviewing student safety plans behaviour plans and plans of care; and
- Developing a plan to deal with COVID-19 related bias, harassment or discrimination and clearly communicating it to all staff, parents and students.

**My collective agreement covers topics like hours of work, supervision responsibilities, health and safety and medical procedures. Will these provisions still be in force for the return to school?**

The collective agreement is a legally binding document and all of its provisions remain in effect for the duration of the term of the agreement. The government would have to pass legislation to suspend or alter collective agreements and there is no indication that would happen. ETFO expects school boards to meet all of their collective agreement obligations and locals will work with them to ensure this happens.

**According to the advice from health authorities, I am considered vulnerable and should be staying at home. What should I do?**

The Ministry of Health's [self-assessment](https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/) [covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/] tool advises that those who are aged 70 years and older, have an underlying medical condition or are immunocompromised stay at home because of increased risk. As the school year approaches, it may be possible for a member to request an accommodation. ETFO will provide more advice on this issue in August.

**Are there additional concerns with the return to school if I am pregnant?**

Pregnant women should consult their medical professional as soon as possible regarding possible implications of COVID-19. More information is available from the [Public Health Agency of Canada](https://canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/pregnancy-advise-mothers.html). [canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/pregnancy-advise-mothers.html]

**Will school boards provide personal protective equipment for education workers who work in close proximity to students?**

Any members, including DECE, ESP and PSP members, who work in close proximity with students will need to consider school board health and safety guidelines provided by the province to direct the equipment required and processes for situations that are part of the member's day (e.g. toileting, feeding, assisting students to regulate, etc.). The government has advised ETFO that personal protective equipment (PPE) will be made available to members who work closely with students and cannot ensure social distancing measures are in place. If a member has concerns that they are not receiving appropriate PPE, they should contact their local.

**The Minister of Education has proposed different scenarios for the return to school in the fall. Will I be required to do both in-class and distance learning?**

Ministry guidance suggests that educators could be responsible for both in-class and distance learning. ETFO is aware of the inherent issues arising from this potential situation and will continue to monitor this closely. ETFO local leaders will also work with school boards to ensure that their expectations are manageable.

## **How do I create my classroom plans for the fall?**

According to Ministry of Education guidelines, each board will be given clarification and direction by some point in early to mid-August. Although members often do summer planning for the year ahead, these are unique circumstances. Members can prepare in a general way by reviewing resources, considering ways to build community and preparing strategies to promote student well-being and mental health. It may be best to wait to make specific curriculum plans (long range, unit, lesson) until your principal communicates how your school will open and the structure of your timetable and school organization (e.g., cohorts, smaller class size, alternate days, etc.).

## **How will Ministry guidelines impact the fall 2020 Progress Report Card/ Kindergarten Communication of Learning: Initial Observations?**

This spring's emergency distance learning created further inequities and gaps in learning for those students who were unable to engage for a variety of reasons. As a result, teachers will need to assess and address potential learning gaps this fall. If COVID-19 continues to impact the pace and consistency of student learning this fall, teachers will require continued flexibility and realistic expectations when describing student progress.

## **What is the role of DECE, ESP and PSP members in the return-to-school protocol?**

DECE, ESP and PSP members will continue to support their fellow educators and students in the return-to-school protocols to be set out by school boards.

The Ministry has stated that an adapted model would have classrooms of 15 students. It is ETFO's position that regardless of the number of students physically present during COVID-19, all kindergarten classrooms should be staffed with a teacher and a DECE.

The Ministry's *Approach to Reopening Schools for the 2020-2021 School Year* document states, "To the greatest extent possible, boards are encouraged to assign students, teachers and educational assistants and ECEs to class groupings as they would in a conventional school year, so that class groupings can be maintained despite the form of delivery that is in place at any one time."

As the 15 students being referenced are part of the greater class complement of students (e.g., 15 of 26 students), they are still part of a whole class that the teacher and DECE Kindergarten team are working with on a daily basis. The students are just in different locations – some will be face-to-face at school with the Kindergarten team and some will be participating in online learning opportunities, meaning there are not less than 16 children in the class. ETFO will continue to advocate to ensure the team stays in place to support the learners in the classroom.

## **When we return to school, how will students with special needs be supported?**

School boards will need to adapt their return-to-school guidelines to meet the needs of students requiring specialized supports and services. School boards should consult with educators and parents about these needs during the transition of returning to school and for on-going programming needs depending on the return-to-school model.

## **As a library worker, I organize resources and computers for classrooms in the school. Will I be able to continue to do this?**

According to Ministry of Education guidelines, there is a no sharing policy. All students should have their own supplies. Where sharing of equipment is required, the equipment should be cleaned between uses.

## **What happens regarding my device and connectivity issues if distance learning continues?**

The Ministry has invested an additional \$15 million dollars into technology. Boards can utilize unused GSN and Per Pupil Funding to address connectivity issues. In mid-May, they were provided with proposals through Ontario Together for low-cost internet connectivity for students, families and educators and for supporting low-cost access to learning devices such as computers, tablets and portable Wi-Fi hotspots. It is likely that these proposals will extend into the new school year. Members should contact their school board for more information.

## **What can I do if I am unable to find child care for my own children?**

The government has announced that day care centres will be permitted to re-open. If a member is unable to access child care, they should discuss the situation with their supervisor. Your school board may determine that your children can attend school on the same days that you are present in order to eliminate any barriers for your return to work. It may also be possible to seek an accommodation on the ground of family status. Members are advised to contact their local office or PRS staff at ETFO if they have concerns about this issue.

## **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)

For updates, please check ETFO's dedicate webpage at [etfo.ca/link/covid19](https://etfo.ca/link/covid19)

