

Ministry of Education

Minister

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Ministère de l'Éducation

Ministre

315, rue Front Ouest
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Dear Parents,

I am writing to you today exactly two weeks since our government declared a State of Emergency in the province.

I know this period has not been easy for you or your children, especially as the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak begin to have increasing effects on your day-to-day lives and livelihoods.

The battle against COVID-19 has not been easy, but I continue to be incredibly inspired by the bravery and steadfastness you and your children have demonstrated in our efforts to stop the spread of this outbreak. Since Cabinet made the decision to close the public-school system on March 12, we have seen cascading steps taken by the public and private sectors to protect our most vulnerable.

I want to assure you that, as Minister of Education, the health and safety of your children remains our government's utmost priority; there is simply no priority more critical. Every decision we make is rooted in the fundamental commitment to safeguard your children's well-being. We are incredibly grateful for the considerable understanding and flexibility you and your children have shown during this period of school closure.

With that commitment in mind, today our government decided to extend the closure of public schools in the province to May 4, along with child care centres and private schools until April 13. In ordinary times, this would be a difficult decision. However, given that Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health concurs that this is in the best interest of you and your children's health, this decision was clear and obvious.

While this announcement is consistent with public health policy, I know that this will raise questions about what your children will be doing over the coming weeks with regards to their education, as in-school instruction will not be taking place.

Today, I was proud to announce our government's plan for the next phase of Learn at Home and how we are supporting students, families, and educators during this period.

To start, we have instructed school boards that, by Monday, April 6, teacher-led learning will resume across the province. Students will begin receiving communication from their teachers and school board staff this week to determine the best way your child can continue learning during this period. For our youngest learners, especially, I am asking you to lend a helping-hand in facilitating these initial conversations with educators when they begin reaching out. This early communication will help ensure all students can participate actively and fully in the rich online learning strategy. We have designed the strategy based on the technology and resources that currently exist at home.

I also know many families in the province may not have access to the technology and broadband connection needed to participate fully in online learning. To remedy this situation, our government has instructed local school boards to offer their existing inventory of computers and devices to students who do not have in-home access. Boards will work with the Ministry to develop a plan to expand the technology to those who need it. I also want to recognize that boards have explored alternative options for students' access to technology, including engaging in regular conversations with telecommunications providers to determine what options exist to allow families to access Ontario's world-leading online learning resources.

This is especially necessary for rural and remote communities where connections might not be optimal. I will update you as these conversations regarding technology and broadband options continue to evolve.

As part of this plan for online learning, our government has outlined the minimum expectations for student work-time in a given week based on learning materials and work assigned by your student's teacher. These expectations, for each teacher, include:

- Kindergarten to grade three: Five hours of work per student per week, with a focus on literacy and math;
- Grades four to six: Five hours of work per week, with a focus on literacy, math, science, and social studies;
- Grades seven to eight: 10 hours of work per week, with a focus on math, literacy, science and social studies; and,
- Grades nine to 12: Three hours of work per course per week for semestered students, and 1.5 hours of work per course per week for non-semestered students, with a focus on credit accumulation and graduation.

Based on these expectations, this second phase of [LearnAtHome](#) will require students to adopt academic discipline and commitment to ensure that they can experience continued academic growth and achievement. I know our students are up to the task.

While these are unprecedented times, I encourage you to support and enable your children to fully commit to the strong learning program we have created for this period of school closure. Your support, inspiration, and motivation will continue to prepare your children to succeed in their learning journey.

I know this period is concerning for parents of students in a graduating cohort. I have said before, and I want to reiterate: no student will have their graduation jeopardized by the developments of COVID-19. I am working closely with the Honourable Ross Romano, Minister of Colleges and Universities, and the post-secondary sector. Our government will ensure students, who plan on entering college or university in September 2020, have our full support to accomplish this goal.

As students continue to accumulate credits during this closure period, we will provide further information about how students can align with the post-secondary application process in the coming weeks.

I understand parents with children who may have special education needs, have concerns about at-home learning and the physical absence of educational support staff and resources during this period. I am firmly and unequivocally committed to ensuring that all students continue to have access to the wrap-around supports that promote continued learning and development.

Our government has instructed boards to enable immediate restoration of communication between students and educational assistants, paraprofessionals, and other education workers to reintroduce the continuity of professional support to students. We will not allow any student to fall through the cracks during this unprecedented time. My Ministry is equipping educators with the tools and supports they need to maximize the opportunities and achievements of all learners in the province in an online setting.

While much of the discourse around COVID-19 focuses on the impacts on physical health, I want to acknowledge the significant effects this outbreak may be having on the mental health of Ontarians. Particularly, our youngest learners may be struggling to fully understand and process what it means to their lives, families, friends, and communities. This may very well be a time of fear and anxiety for your child, even if it is not readily apparent.

While you and your children may have many questions about what the future holds, I want to express my heartfelt hope that all children know there are a variety of supports to help process and overcome the multitude of emotions and reactions they may be facing during this period. Our government has directed school boards to ensure mental health workers and professional staff are ready to engage with students immediately in a secure and safe conversation. We continue to support the incredible work being done to provide wrap-around counselling and resources to students across the province.

We have numerous organizations providing critical and professional support for children facing mental health concerns or distress. For example, [Kids Help Phone](#) offers 24/7 counselling and referral services across the province. To use this free resource, children can call 1-800-668-6868, or text CONNECT to 686868.

As we move forward in the next phase of school closure, the expectations of parents, guardians, students, educators, and my Ministry will continue to rise. Having already met countless driven and determined students, educators, and educational workers across the province, I know that we are ready to meet the challenges ahead.

To you, and your child, I want to extend my sincere and unwavering commitment to ensuring every student in the province can continue learning in Ontario's world-class education system. Our collective commitment to inspiring, supporting, and uplifting our future leaders during this time is unwavering.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Lecce". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and a long, sweeping underline.

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education