

Monday, December 14, 2020

Mr. Joseph Martino, Chair  
Toronto Catholic District School  
Board (TCDSB)  
Toronto, Ontario  
M2N 6E8

Dr. Brendan Browne, Director  
Toronto Catholic District School  
Board (TCDSB)  
Toronto, Ontario  
M2N 6E8

**Re: Protecting the Health and Safety of Students and Staff**

Dear Mr. Martino and Dr. Browne:

As seven Presidents who represent over 10,000 unionized workers in the Toronto Catholic District School Board, we are committed to protecting the health and safety of students, education workers and their respective families. Given this commitment, we have serious concerns with the increasing spread of COVID-19 in our school communities.

During the period of September 18 to October 1, 2020, 21 TCDSB schools were identified as having COVID-19 cases. On December 10 and 11 alone, 19 TCDSB schools were identified as having cases. As of December 14, 83 schools have active cases with another three schools shut down for the week.

On September 18, the number of COVID-19 cases in the entire province was 425. On December 14, Toronto alone reported 544 cases. Case numbers have been rising in both the schools and the community, in general. However, it is still unclear as to the actual number of cases in schools, as many individuals may be asymptomatic. In the schools where asymptomatic testing was conducted, it became evident that the outbreak was more severe than first thought.

Therefore, our first recommendation is that wide-spread asymptomatic testing be implemented in our schools. This voluntary testing will better confirm what is occurring in schools and the impact schools are having on community spread. Further, this testing will better safeguard the health and safety of our TCDSB communities and, potentially, limit the spread of this deadly disease.

Another significant concern is the upcoming Christmas Break. The Minister of Health indicated that Thanksgiving festivities may have impacted the province's efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19. Despite current restrictions, public health officials are concerned that Christmas celebrations may further compromise attempts to contain the virus.

Therefore, our second recommendation is that all TCDSB schools move to online learning for at least a period two weeks of time following the Christmas holidays. This action will better limit the possibility of a post holiday surge occurring in our schools.

We are requesting that Board officials take every opportunity, particularly when meeting with

the Ministry of Education and Toronto Public Health, to strongly encourage the acceptance of these recommendations. Further, we are proposing that the Board of Trustees and the Unions send out a Joint Communiqué to the Minister of Health, Minister of Education and Toronto Public Health asking that these recommendations be implemented in the TCDSB.

With the development of a vaccine, for the first time, in almost a year, there is renewed hope that there will be an end to this pandemic. At this time, though, the virus continues to pose a serious health risk to all Ontarians. It is imperative that as leaders in the largest Catholic Board, we take decisive action to safeguard the health and safety our students, staff and families.

We look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

Julie Altomare-DiNunzio – President  
Toronto Elementary Catholic Teachers-OECTA

Joshua Bertini – President  
CUPE Local 1280

Val DiGregorio – President  
CUPE 3155

Julie Mazzuca-Peter – President  
APSSP

Pete McKay – President  
Toronto Secondary Unit – OECTA

Lina Naccarato – President  
CUPE 1328

Diego Olmedo – President  
ETFO-DECE

cc. TCDSB Board of Trustees  
Annalisa Crudo-Perri, OAPCE Executive Director  
Joe Fiorante, CPIC Chair