

August 18, 2021

Ontario's teacher unions support mandatory vaccinations in schools

TORONTO, ON—Today, the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO), Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA), and Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) issued the following statement in support of mandatory vaccinations in schools:

"Ontario's education unions representing teachers, education support workers, and other school staff support mandatory vaccinations in schools. To provide the greatest level of protection to Ontario's students and communities, we believe that everyone working in, or attending a school who is eligible and can be safely vaccinated, should be vaccinated.

Any mandatory vaccination program must include provisions that ensure that those who are unable to be vaccinated for medical or religious reasons receive all the required employment accommodations and are not disadvantaged in any way. Individuals who are exempted for reasons due to statements of conscience, or are not vaccinated, must be required to take additional precautions for their own safety and that of those around them including regular testing, using additional PPE, ensuring distancing requirements are met, and adhering to other enhanced safety protocols.

Today's release of the vaccine disclosure policy falls well short of what's needed. Too few details have been provided with schools only weeks away from reopening. This government must work with the province's medical and public health experts to provide clear and consistent direction to school boards and the public. A mandatory vaccination program with proper provincial direction would provide greater protection against the spread of COVID-19 in school communities and protect students, especially those under the age of 12, as well as others who are unable to vaccinate or do not have access. As the fourth wave of the pandemic intensifies, the Ford government cannot continue to abdicate its responsibilities by downloading COVID-19 planning onto school boards at the last minute.

And while vaccinations are important for a safe and sustainable return to in-person learning, they must be accompanied by other measures called for by education and public health experts, including improved ventilation, a robust testing and tracing system, smaller class sizes, masking for all staff and students, and a government-convened consultative and advisory table of education and public health experts.

The government must also make the necessary investments to increase vaccine education, awareness, and accessibility. Such a strategy must recognize that the pandemic has disproportionately affected members of equity-seeking and sovereignty-seeking communities.

We will continue to advocate on behalf of teachers and education workers and the students they serve to ensure a safe and sustainable return this September, so that students can enjoy the benefits of in-person learning without the repeated disruptions of the previous school year."

Barb Dobrowolski, President, OECTA
Sam Hammond, President, ETFO
Karen Littlewood, President, OSSTF/FEESO
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