



Dawn Danko
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Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board
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January 21, 2022

Hon. Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education
315 Front Street, 14th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 0B8

Dear Minister Lecce,

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I want to share concerns and requests found in [two motions](#) brought forward by Student Trustees and approved at the Monday, January 17, meeting of the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) Board of Trustees.

Both request action from Ontario's government on issues of safety, equity and transparency.

Medical Grade Masks for Students

The first motion asks that the Ministry of Education provide and fully fund medical grade level 2 masks and unfitted respirators (such as unfitted N95 and KN95 masks) for every student in the province, in the same way that unfitted respirators are being fully funded and provided to education staff.

Provincial reporting shows that schools, and especially elementary schools, account for the bulk of COVID-19 outbreaks in Ontario. Most Ontario students are only partially vaccinated or not yet eligible to be vaccinated.

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) has stated for both children and adults that "while non-medical masks can help prevent the spread of COVID-19, medical masks and respirators (such as N95 and KN95 masks) provide better protection."

We need to extend the same workplace health and safety protections offered to education staff to students, who are required by law to attend school. Masking must be considered through an equity lens as affordability and availability of paediatric and adult medical masks and respirators is a significant barrier for many families. Further, many families who cannot afford enhanced masking also do not have the financial privilege of choosing online learning.

COVID-19 Case Reporting

The second motion raises the concern that, at the height of the pandemic, the Ministry told school boards they no longer had to publicly report COVID-19 cases, public health units are no longer contact tracing for schools, and the province has reduced access to publicly funded PCR testing.

Hamilton's high case rates are estimated to capture only a fraction of actual COVID-19 cases. This means that families are trying to make informed decisions about isolating, notifying close contacts and staying safe, but with less information available to do so.



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We are requesting that school boards resume the public reporting of suspected COVID-19 cases identified through Rapid Antigen Tests and continue to publicly report confirmed cases identified by PCR tests. This practice aligns with the democratic values of public accountability and transparency.

Thank you for your consideration, and for sharing our commitment to keep schools open and safe for in-person learning. I would be happy to discuss our requests further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D Danko".

Dawn Danko
Chair, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board