

January 7, 2022

The Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
The Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education
The Honourable Christine Elliot, Minister of Health
Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health

Re: Vaccination prioritization and returning to in-person learning

To the Honourable Doug Ford, the Honourable Stephen Lecce, the Honourable Christine Elliott, and Dr. Kieran Moore:

At the January 5, 2022 meeting of the Board of Trustees for the Halton District School Board, the following motion received unanimous approval:

Be it resolved that the Chair be directed to write a letter to the Premier, Minister of Education, Minister of Health and Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health to:

- a) Prioritize vaccination/boosters for all students and education workers;**
- b) Consider reopening grades 7 through 12 to in-person learning immediately with the younger grades to follow as soon as possible;**
- c) Publicly recognize that many education staff worked tirelessly over what was to be a much needed holiday, to accommodate Provincial directives with very short implementation timelines and very large societal impacts.**

The provincial government has continually emphasized that it is of the utmost importance for student well-being that schools remain open for in-person learning in Ontario. Unfortunately, with the most recent surge in the Omicron variant, the Ontario provincial government announced that public education will be delivered remotely until at least January 17, 2022, despite multiple references that "schools should be the last to close and the first to open".

The Halton District School Board recognizes that schools are safe learning environments with robust in-school infection control and prevention measures in place which are key to reopening schools to in-person learning. Support received from provincial and federal governments have allowed school boards to offer standardized daily screening, non-fit tested N95 masks for staff, multi layered masks for students, both rapid antigen and polymerase chain reaction testing, additional air filtration, and some

reduction in class size, where possible, among other measures. The continuity, consistency and enhancement of these measures will be critical moving forward.

We are grateful that the Province is creating an opportunity for GTHA board staff for priority access to a central vaccination site in Brampton. Students could also benefit from a similar opportunity. Vaccinations complement safe learning environments as they provide an added layer of protection for students, staff and their families, as well as the broader community. Prioritization of everyone in the education sector, over the next two weeks especially, will assist Boards in maintaining staffing and protecting learning time moving forward.

Halton Region is fortunate to have a high vaccination rate with 95% of students in grades 7-12 having already received their second vaccine dose as of January 5, 2022 ([halton.ca - January 5, 2022](https://www.halton.ca)), Therefore, we kindly ask that the government consider reopening grades 7 - 12 to in-person learning immediately with younger grades to follow as soon as possible.

There are many other organizations who support our advocacy of this multi-pronged approach, which includes vaccine prioritization and urgent reopening of schools. These include infectious disease specialists, the Children's Health Coalition, the Ontario Student Trustees' Association-l'Association des Élèves Conseillers et Conseillères de l'Ontario (OSTA-AECO), the Ontario Principals' Council (OPC), Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), and the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA). Dedicated, high-volume vaccination clinics are an excellent way to support the expedited vaccination of students and staff. This, in turn, will support all schools to reopen as quickly and safely as possible. We are pleased that the government has begun to take steps towards this.

Lastly, we feel it is critical that all levels of government recognize the outstanding and profound sacrifices that staff, students and families continue to make, despite years of pandemic-related challenges and changing requirements and restrictions with very little notice.

The Trustees of the Halton District School Board recognize that schools provide important stability and social support for students and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, we urge the government to take immediate action on these prioritizations. Thank you so much for all of your efforts thus far in keeping our school communities safe.

Sincerely,



Margo Shuttleworth
Chair of the Board of Trustees, Halton District School Board

Cc: Dr. Hamidah Meghani, Medical Officer of Health, Halton Region

Hon. Ted Arnott, MPP

Stephen Crawford, MPP

Hon. Parm Gill, MPP

Hon. Jane McKenna, MPP

Effie Triantafilopoulos, MPP

Ontario School Board Chairs (English Public, English Catholic, French Public, French Catholic)

Cathy Abraham, President, Ontario Public School Boards' Association

Cindy Gage, President, District 20 Halton Teachers' Bargaining Unit

Lisa Klimkoski, President, ETFO Halton Local