



September 17, 2020

The Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
The Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education
The Honourable Chistine Elliot, Minister of Health, Government of Ontario
Chair Gary Carr, Regional Chair of Halton
Dr. Hamidah Meghani, Medical Officer of Health, Halton Region

To the Honourable Doug Ford, the Honourable Stephen Lecce, the Honourable Christine Elliot, Chair Gary Carr and Dr. Hamidah Meghani:

As the Province of Ontario battles COVID-19, all barriers to easily accessible and efficient testing must be eliminated to ensure equitable access to education and stable, safe learning environments, to mitigate increased short-term staffing costs, and more broadly, to foster recovery of the economy.

In Halton Region, as in many locations around Ontario, staff and students are unable to easily access testing and receive timely results. All local COVID-19 testing centres require an appointment. For symptomatic individuals, local testing sites are currently booking appointments up to four days after an initial appointment request is made. Then, public health documentation states that it can take up to four additional days to receive results (with a caveat on the Ministry of Health's results portal stating that it may take longer).

As the listed symptoms for COVID-19 mimic symptoms of common ailments in children and adults, there will be many students and staff potentially waiting for up to eight days to receive results. There are many negative implications to this, including up to eight days of:

- lost in-person learning for students
- demand for Board resources required to retain short-term occasional (supply) staff to cover teachers and educational assistants (EAs)
- lost working time for a parent or guardian, potentially putting families at risk of lost wages and job loss
- delayed contact tracing and containment, potentially allowing COVID-19 to spread in communities and schools in the event that tests do in fact return positive (hence, dramatically increasing the time and resources required for the resultant contact tracing and containment).

Easily accessible, immediate COVID-19 testing and rapid (same-day) results would mitigate these issues.

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The long wait times for testing and results faced by students, staff and family members experiencing suspect symptoms upon self-assessment, highlight the pressures placed upon testing sites and Ontario's lab capacity, and point to the demand for testing which will only continue to grow as Ontarians continue to be vigilant in their efforts to stop and prevent the spread of COVID-19 during this pandemic.

One possible solution may be to direct the new Public Health Nurses to the role of student/staff COVID-19 testing in order to support stable and safe learning environments.

In sum, the Trustees of the Halton District School Board implore you to make same-day, easily accessible COVID-19 testing and results for students and staff an immediate and top priority.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andréa Grebenc', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Andréa Grebenc
Chair of the Board of Trustees, Halton District School Board

Cc: MPP Ted Arnott,
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MPP Parm Gill,
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