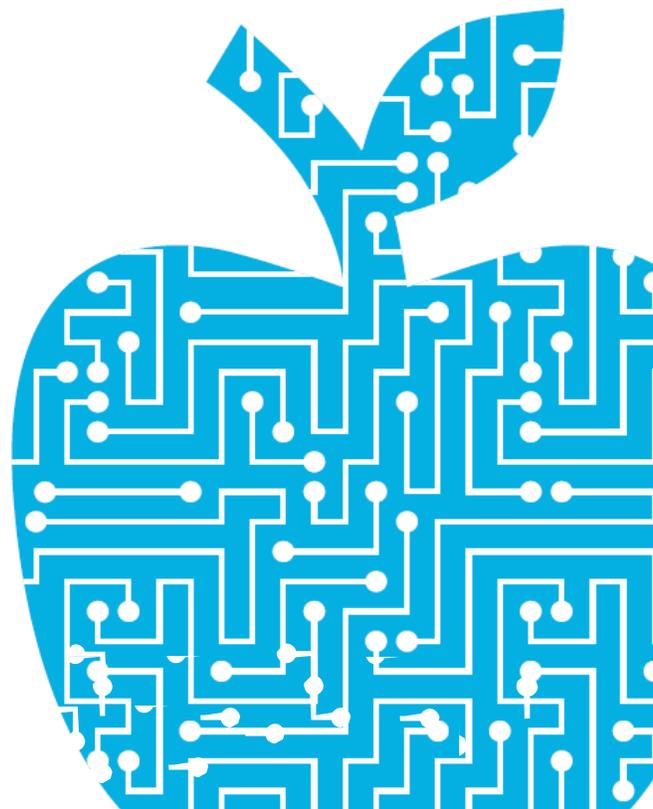


# Ontario's Framework for Continued Learning.

A Plan to Keep Students **Safe**.

A Plan to Keep Students **Learning**.

A Pathway to Re-Open Schools **Responsibly**.





## **Foreword by the Minister of Education**

We are in unprecedented times.

This week, I announced the closure of all publicly-funded schools until the end of June. This decision was based on protecting the health and safety of your child, your family, and your community.

For the last few months, you and your children have taken extraordinary steps and shown great flexibility to continue your children’s learning journey. Our government has also been working to make sure you and your children have access to the tools, resources, and predictability that we have all sought during these times.

We have heard clearly from parents that they expect dynamic live education for their children. The connection between a student, their peers, and their teacher is more important than ever. Two weeks ago, I wrote to school boards and other education sector partners to express my expectation that teachers utilize live teaching—sometimes called ‘synchronous learning’—for entire classes, smaller group settings, or one-on-one interactions.

While this is by no means a normal time in your child’s education, it is critically important to allow your child to have access to a school community, support network, and learning experience that is as close to normal as possible. I will continue to advocate for this, as we must strive to do more to serve our children in these extraordinary and tough times.

We have heard from parents that there is a need to provide bridge programming and other gap-closing initiatives during the fast-approaching summer period. We know that the learning loss that takes place every year over the summer can be a challenge to students when school resumes in September. This year, the risk of summer learning loss is more pronounced.

That is why we are providing new opportunities for students to continue learning over the summer. We also have announced Ontario’s Summer Learning Plan, which is a robust plan for summer learning opportunities, including new programs and initiatives. I encourage you to discuss these options with your child, to determine if there are opportunities to continue their learning over the summer.

Some of these initiatives include:

- New upgrading courses, which will allow Grade 9-12 students to upgrade a full credit course they passed during the school year in 55 hours, rather than the normal 110 hours;
- Specific learning supports for students with special education needs and mental health needs, including access to EAs, a new two-week program in skills development, learning, and routine establishment, and a summer extension of after-school programming for students with autism;
- Working with our cross-government team, we will be providing virtual opportunities for students to volunteer during the summer, which can be counted toward the community service graduation requirement.

These programs and resources were designed with your child in mind, and I am pleased to confirm that we have more than doubled the funding available during the summer period for this continued programming. As we roll out Ontario's Summer Learning Plan, please be assured that new virtual components will be available and strict protocols will be unveiled for in-class summer learning should emergency measures be lifted. We are also creating an organized and safe framework to allow families to retrieve items in schools, led by local school boards.

Looking ahead to the Fall, when schools reopen, we know that school may not look or feel the same. While we have seen other provinces suggest what their classrooms may look like in September, we know that each part of our country is impacted and responding differently to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Our government is in regular contact with Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. David Williams, and the education system remains a top priority for the COVID-19 Command Table. I have also spoken with the leadership of the Hospital for Sick Children, who have provided important counsel in how we continue to support students' health and safety at school.

We are working aggressively to make sure Ontario's schools and classrooms represent the safest learning environments possible, we will provide our plan for resumption of class in September in short order, which will include strict safety protocols and public health measures.

As our province moves further along the recovery path, we should be proud of our collective efforts that are now showing signs of hope and optimism. Despite this, we appreciate that students and children may struggle to make sense of this pandemic. We are all doing our best to stay strong and positive during this period, and you may be having difficult and emotional discussions with your children during this time.

You and your children are not alone. At the onset of the school closure period, I encouraged school boards to immediately ensure that their mental health workers and professional staff are available to engage in safe and secure conversations with students who feel the need to talk. Our government has also provided emergency funding of up to \$12 million to immediately expand online and virtual mental health supports, many of which are directly tailored for youth.

Our government has been consistently clear; the health and well-being of your child guides every decision we make. We will get through this together, and in doing so will always work in the best interest of your child, your family, and your community.

**I know that together, we will continue to rise to the challenge.**

Minister Stephen Lecce

## **Planning for the 2020-21 School Year**

The Ontario government has announced that schools will remain closed until the end of June.

Over the remaining weeks of the current school year, the Ministry of Education will continue listening to students, parents, school boards, educators and health experts on a plan to safely and effectively return for the next school year.

Our schools are a learning environment for two million students, and a workplace for almost 200,000 teachers and staff. The re-opening of schools in a safe and effective way is essential for the development and mental health of our children, our economy and our well-being as a province.

The current COVID19 emergency is evolving, and public health guidance will be refined between now and September to ensure the utmost safety of those returning to school. Any plan needs to be flexible and responsive to the most current health advice.

The Ministry of Education will continue to welcome input as the re-opening approach is refined. The ministry will formulate guidance for school boards before the end of the school year to allow for adequate time to put appropriate adaptations in place. The ministry is inviting feedback on these elements as well as any additional commentary that may be relevant to this planning process.

As we continue listening and responding to the voices of our students, parents and partners in the education and health sectors, this paper outlines some of the key priorities and considerations the ministry is working on in response to the COVID19 outbreak.

## **Strengthening Summer learning**

Summer learning programs will take place in July and August and will include a diverse and robust range of new and existing credit and non-credit supports for students. With these enhancements to Ontario's Summer Learning Program, this will allow for more than double the number of students to participate in summer programming compared to previous years.

In order to mitigate the impacts of the school closure period and learning loss that may typically occur during the summer, we have focused summer learning opportunities on traditional and non-traditional programming, including summer school, course

upgrading, and targeted programs for vulnerable students, students with special education or mental health needs, and Indigenous students. We encourage students to consider participating in one or more of these summer learning opportunities, if they feel comfortable doing so.

Ontario's Summer Learning Plan includes seven areas of focus:

1. **Expanded core programming** represents 'traditional' summer school courses focused on grades 9 to 12, with additional opportunities for grade 8 students to reach ahead.
2. **Introduction of upgrading courses**, which will allow students to upgrade their mark in a course in half the time it would have taken them previously.
3. **Targeted supports for vulnerable students** to ensure vulnerable students have access to non-credit ministry educational programs and leadership supports.
4. **Focused programming for students with special education or mental health needs**, including dedicated learning supports such as access to EAs and existing after-school programs that could be delivered through summer school
5. **Communicating volunteer opportunities** for students so that students can leverage virtual volunteer opportunities where possible;
6. **Summer programming in Provincial and Demonstration Schools** to focus on continued learning for our students with particular needs and specialized integrated programming, including students with physical disabilities, and, finally,
7. **Key concept mapping for next year's learning** to focus on compulsory, high-demand and pre-requisite secondary courses

School boards should plan for these initiatives to be delivered through remote teaching and learning, although if emergency measures are lifted or eased during the summer, additional guidance will follow for transitioning to in-person delivery. We recognize that summer programming may look different across the Province as school boards develop innovative, creative, and flexible programming to meet the needs of students.

School boards should continue to be ready to provide our child care partners with access to schools over the summer, as the reopening plan for child care and camp programs are considered in the context of the government's Restart Plan. These will be critical supports for children and families, and a considerable portion of child care programs across the province are located in schools.

[Learn At Home / Apprendre à la maison](#) offers some of the best resources featuring made-in-Ontario activities and courses to keep the learning going, from home. New resources are added often, and we are working to ensure there are new and exciting resources available through to the end of the school year and beyond.

## **Enhanced *Learn At Home* Portal**

A more user-friendly Learn at Home site was launched today, and an adapted summer learning site will be developed to provide resources to help students refresh their learning in preparation for 2020-21 courses. The site will focus on compulsory, high-demand, and prerequisite secondary courses, such as math, science and English/Français.

## **Delivering Access to Learning Tools**

The Government has taken leadership to leverage all tools, resources, technologies, and services to assist school boards to deliver equitable and effective learning while at home through access to technology and internet connectivity for students who do not have such access, especially in rural and remote parts of Ontario. To help improve access to remote learning, Ontario is partnering with 34 organizations and private businesses along with school boards to address key needs among educators, students and their families during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Ontario has worked to identify high-impact solutions that can significantly assist in improving the Learn At Home experience now and into the future. Access to digital learning resources, supports for special education needs and mental health, as well as internet connectivity and access to devices have all been identified by school boards and other stakeholders as urgent needs during the current school closure period. These organizations and businesses were identified through a call for proposals open on the [Ontario Together](#) website from March 31 to April 21.

## **Celebrating our students**

Students have worked incredibly hard this school year, and we know that the COVID-19 outbreak has forced some schools to cancel or delay important milestones to recognize student achievement, such as prom and graduation ceremonies.

Although we are making great efforts to limit the spread of COVID-19 in Ontario, it may still be some time before schools and boards are able to offer the kinds of ceremonies and traditions in the same way they have in previous years. We firmly believe Ontario students deserve this positive conclusion to their academic journey, even if ceremonies are delayed.

Despite this uncertainty, the Ministry is encouraging school boards to reschedule these events based on input from local medical officers of health. In some cases, this might mean facilitating graduation ceremonies and proms during the summer or fall when it is safe to do so.

## **Financial Relief for Parents**

Ontario is helping parents pay for the extra costs associated with school and child care closures during the COVID-19 outbreak through the Support for Families initiative, a one-time payment of \$200 per child up to 12 years of age, and \$250 for those with special needs, including children enrolled in private schools. To date, the province has supported over 1.2 million children and youth in Ontario. Monies have largely been processed, while outstanding requests are being processed in short order.

## **Transitioning back to school**

Beyond the 2020 summer learning period, we are preparing for what school will look like for students come September.

Teachers and education workers typically plan for a refresher period for students every September. This year, those plans may need to be more comprehensive and more reflective of the uneven learning experience that students may be bringing into their next school year. The Ministry of Education is exploring a formalized process for this to take place, to ensure all students are able to have an opportunity to start the year on the best footing possible.

In addition to Ontario's Summer Learning Plan, school boards will also be provided with funding to support students with special education needs and mental health needs to re-establish familiarity with the school environment once emergency measures are lifted, and the re-establishment of routines as well as gap closing in skills development and learning.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the lives of students by displacing regular routines, and removing extracurricular opportunities such as sports, clubs and other

social activities. In response, the Learn at Home website will also include free well-being resources for students and families to access throughout the summer months.

In a year with a number of re-entry priorities, the Ministry of Education will also be analyzing what adjustments should be considered for the school calendar.

New health and safety protocols will be developed with the advice of public health and the Ministry of Labour, which issues guidelines for workplaces in Ontario. These protocols will need to include guidance on cleaning protocols, the use of personal protective equipment and the participation in school by employees who may be older or have health profiles that may put them at higher risk.

The Ministry of Education will continue to seek guidance on infection prevention and control measures, screening, testing and adapted classroom environments from experts such as the Hospital for Sick Children, Ontario Health and the Ontario Ministry of Health.

## **Fluency between face-to-face and online delivery**

Depending on public health circumstances, some schools may need to remain closed, or may need to plan to open and close during the school year to keep students safe. School boards and educators will be expected to move fluently between in person and online delivery, and the ministry will be communicating further on this. The ministry, parents, and students will continue to expect that teachers utilize synchronous learning approaches in this learning.

Access to technology will continue to be a priority. The Ministry of Education will continue to work with school boards to extend the availability of devices and connectivity throughout the province, and to identify options for students and staff where internet availability is limited. While over 200,000 devices have been distributed to students across the province to date, we will continue to support boards in meeting the technological needs of students.

When students return to school, it may not look and feel the same at first. Health advice is evolving but the Ministry of Education will be guided by health expertise, with the foremost commitment to protecting the health, safety, and well-being of students. The look of classrooms and the rhythm of the school day may need to be adapted to keep students safe, while maximizing learning opportunities.

As we know, Ontario's curriculum offers students a wide range of learning experiences, in classrooms, labs, gyms, technical classrooms, arts environments and experiential settings. Maintaining access to this range of learning experiences, while adapting them to reflect guidance that keeps students safe, will require creativity, planning and adaptation. Jurisdictions around the world look to Ontario's curricula, and we are committed to making sure students can continue pursuing their academic passions as well as the fundamentals for a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy.

Ontario's teachers provide feedback, assessment and report cards for their students based on Ontario's Growing Success policy document on student assessment. Adaptations have been already introduced to assessment practices during the current school closure period, reflecting advice from educators. There may be a continued need for adapted assessment and report card policies in the coming school year.

Many students and families rely on school buses to get to school safely every day. Next year, safe school bus transportation will include practices informed by public health advice, and may include fewer students on buses, and different bus schedules.

## **Supporting student well-being**

Structured group environments, physical education and connection with peers are a critical aspect of mental health for children. While keeping students and teachers safe, efforts will be made to preserve these critical components of school.

Schools are an important connection to mental health supports for students. A re-entry plan will include opportunities for all those who support students with mental health challenges to do professional development over the summer, and for school boards to offer students more access to mental health supports when they return. When the decision was first made to close schools, the government encouraged school boards to immediately ensure that all available mental health workers, professional staff, and other support staff remained fully available to students, with adapted communication protocols and mechanisms where necessary.

Our government has provided emergency funding of up to \$12 million to immediately expand online and virtual mental health supports, many of which are directly tailored for youth. In addition, there are many organizations that provide critical support for children who face mental health concerns or distress. A great example is Kids Help Phone, which offers 24/7 counselling and referral services across the province. To use this free resource, children can call 1-800-668-6868, or text CONNECT to 686868. In addition,

School Mental Health Ontario has a number of great resources for students, parents and families on their website at [www.smho-smso.ca](http://www.smho-smso.ca). And child and youth mental health agencies across the province continue to provide services.

In addition, School Mental Health Ontario will provide training to mental health professionals, educators and system leaders to equip them with the information and resources they need to support the mental health of students with the return to school.

Schools need to welcome back students with special needs and prepare for adapted classrooms that may require personal protective equipment for staff and students where physical distancing may not be practical. This summer, the ministry is providing additional funding to support students with special education needs in both expanded and new summer program offerings.

## **Share your feedback**

You can provide a written submission with your input, ideas or data by sending an email to [EDU.consultation@ontario.ca](mailto:EDU.consultation@ontario.ca). Make sure to:

- include your name and the name of your organization
- use “Ontario’s Plan to Reopen Schools” in the subject line
- attach your submission as a PDF or Word document