

Ontario Makes Major Investment in Mental Health and Technology to Support Students

New resources will help students return to school with the tools they need to succeed

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VAUGHAN - The Ontario Minister of Education, Stephen Lecce, announced \$15 million to purchase thousands of classroom computers, and \$10 million to hire additional mental health workers. These new resources will help ensure students can return to school with the confidence and the tools they need to succeed. This funding represents the highest amount the Ministry of Education has ever dedicated to these two areas through the Grants for Student Needs (GSN).

Through consultations with Public Health Ontario, the Hospital for Sick Children and front-line workers, the government heard about the need for enhanced mental health supports to respond to COVID-19. This new \$10 million investment will provide students with unprecedented direct access to regulated mental health professionals and significantly reduce wait times.

"We know that the COVID-19 outbreak has impacted student mental health and well-being," said Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education. "That is why our government is significantly increasing investments in supporting the mental health of students as we prepare for the reopening of schools. This investment represents a considerable increase in mental health funding that will help ensure critical front-line and wrap-around supports are helping those Ontario students who need it most."

Today's announced funding of \$10 million is in addition to the government's commitment of \$25 million in permanent funding to hire approximately 180 front-line mental health workers in secondary schools across Ontario.

"There is nothing more important than ensuring the health and safety of our children and youth, and that includes mental health," said Michael Tibollo, Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. "Today's announcement will bring much-needed resources to support the mental health of Ontario's students, and moves us one step closer to creating a mental health and addictions system that works for all Ontarians."

The province also recognizes that access to technology is more important now than ever as students prepare for a new environment which could include both learning at home and in-

person learning. That is why the government is providing \$15 million to secure up to 35,000 classroom computers. This new technology will help ensure students who face difficulty accessing technology are able to leverage these tools to succeed in the 2020-21 school year.

"COVID-19 is forcing the world around us to change, to adapt, and to embrace the digital landscape," said Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education. "We will invest more in student computers, technology, and internet than any government in Ontario history because we want our youth to retain a competitive advantage. By delivering this funding, we are sending a signal to the country: Ontario is investing in our kids, closing the digital divide, and taking action to ensure all students have the best opportunity to learn when returning to school in the fall."

Access to digital learning resources, 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. The Government is proceeding with internet connectivity at all schools in Ontario, including all high schools by September 2020 and all elementary schools by September 2021.

QUOTES:

"School Mental Health Ontario is proud to work together with Ontario school boards to advance student mental health through evidence-based mental health promotion, prevention, and early intervention services. We welcome this significant new investment in the mental health of students. It will help schools to reach more students with needed supports, and enhances the power of prevention and wellness promotion. Overall, this commitment contributes to a stronger system of mental health support for children, youth, and families in our province." - Kathy Short, Executive Director, School Mental Health Ontario

"Big Brothers Big Sisters Ontario is honoured to be a part of the provincial government's efforts and investment into the mental health and well-being of all students in Ontario. We are committed to supporting over 20,000 and counting vulnerable youth across our province. We are dedicated to being present for the families, children and youth who need our assistance and are proud to be part of Ontario's recovery efforts." - Susan Ingram, Executive Director, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Ottawa

"Technology in education fails when it diminishes the role of the teacher in the learning process. The Ontario Government is committed to solutions that maximize the role of teachers in improving student outcomes for important STEM subjects like math. Knowledgehook, trusted by teachers in 69 of the 72 school districts across Ontario, is used by over 150,000 math teachers globally. Today's announcement by Minister Lecce shows a commitment to help close the digital divide and prepare the next generation of Canadian problem solvers for the global economy by putting educators first." - Travis Ratnam, CEO, Knowledgehook

"In the last few months, the Ontario government, school boards, teachers, administrators and parents have all worked together and gone to extraordinary lengths to help Ontario students transition to distance, remote or fully online learning. While there is no substitute for teacher-directed learning in the classroom, here at home in Ontario and around the world, we've seen what technology can do to help keep our education system resilient, and to make a real, positive impact in the way students learn." - John Baker, President and CEO, D2L

"The necessary emergency measures have posed significant risks to the mental health of kids who have been away from their support networks at school. It is to be expected that returning to school will also present unique challenges after a prolonged period of closures. Improving access to mental health professionals and other resources is good news for children and their families." - Dr. Ronald Cohn, President and CEO of The Hospital for Sick Children

QUICK FACTS

- Ontario launched [Learn at Home](#) and [Apprendre à la maison](#), a new online portal that provides resources for families so students can continue their education while schools are closed due to the ongoing COVID-19 situation.
- The Ministry of Education provides operating funding to Ontario's 72 district school boards through the annual GSN education funding model. Funding to school boards is provided on a combination of per student, per school, and per board basis.
- Through the government's Broadband Modernization Program, the province is working with all school boards to deliver sustainable, modernized networks with improved Internet access at the target speed. As of March 31, 2020, broadband modernization is complete at 1,983 schools and in progress at 2,954 schools.
- During the school closure period, the Ministry of Education [partnered](#) with Apple and Rogers to provide school boards with a high-impact, low-cost technology and connectivity solution to support remote learning. This partnership has provided tens of thousands of iPads equipped with three months free wireless data from Rogers to students in need. This is in addition to over 200,000 board devices that have been distributed to students across the province, supported by a \$75M annual investment in technology by the Ministry of Education.
- On World Mental Health Day in 2019, the government [announced](#) an investment of nearly \$40 million, to advance student mental health in partnership with education groups.
- Ontario is investing a landmark \$3.8B in mental health supports to ensure a continuum of mental health and well-being support and resources from early years and beyond.

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- [Learn at Home](#)
- [Learn About how the Government is Supporting People, Businesses and Families during COVID-19](#)

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