

Students Head Back to Class in Safer Schools

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[Education](#)

TORONTO — Today, Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education, issued the following statement as students head back to class:

"I am proud of all Ontario students heading back to class, be it in-person or online. In keeping with the expert advice of Ontario's pediatric hospitals and the Chief Medical Officer of Health, we have invested heavily in ventilation improvements to support safer schools. We have deployed standalone HEPA units into every kindergarten class, into every learning space without mechanical ventilation, and some school boards have gone even further by placing HEPA units in every classroom.

Our cautious plan is designed to minimize disruption and maximize safety — with a focus on ventilation improvements — so that your children can continue learning through the year.

While Ontario's plan is cautious to protect students and staff, it also prioritizes learning recovery in reading and math. New supports for students from our youngest learners to those who will graduate this school year will help unlock their potential and bridge the gaps that arose last year.

To Ontario's intelligent and kind student community, please continue to remain vigilant as we navigate this pandemic and know that your families, educators and government are proud of you."

BACKGROUND

In the 2021-22 school year, Ontario's plan allows for:

- Return to in-person learning for the full school day, though synchronous remote learning will remain an option;
- Learning in classrooms supported by physical distancing, and enhanced cleaning; and,
- Student participation in extracurricular activities, clubs, music and the arts, both within the school and through inter-school sport. Public health units may recommend or direct additional measures or modifications based on local context.

Ontario's safer return to school is supported by significant investments, and the province is making available more than \$1.6 billion in targeted COVID-19 resources. Supported by the province's COVID-19 strategy, as well as other provincial funding, \$80 million in funding is being provided for mental health supports to protect students, teachers, and school staff this coming school year.

In preparation for the return of in-person learning, the province has also invested substantially in improvements to air ventilation at schools. These improvements mean that:

- 99.8% of the systems have been assessed;
- 99% of schools are using higher grade filters and/or have increased frequency of filter changes;
- 99% of schools are running ventilation systems longer;
- 99% of schools have increased fresh air intake; and
- Over 70,000 standalone HEPA filter units and other devices are now in place in schools across the province, including JK/SK classrooms, all classrooms and learning environments without mechanical ventilation.

These improvements to school ventilation build on the \$1.4 billion the Ontario government invests every year to maintain and renew school facilities across the province.

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