

**Open Letter from York Region Education Unions Calling for Improved Supports
and Asymptomatic Testing for Staff and Students during COVID-19**

TO

Premier Doug Ford

Christine Elliott, Ontario Minister of Health

Stephen Lecce, Ontario Minister of Education

Dr. Karim Kurji, Medical Officer of Health, York Region

Louise Sirisko, Director, York Region District School Board

Cynthia Cordova, Chair, York District School Board

As the number of COVID-19 cases rise in schools across York Region, impacting the health and mental well-being of all students and Education workers, Education Unions of York Region are asking the Government and Public Health Units to take action that will demonstrate true concern and commitment to ensure that every school has the resources to provide safe spaces for all.

The recent choice of schools identified to be tested for asymptomatic cases was perplexing. We have schools in York Region with over ten cases and confirmed outbreaks yet they remain open without access to onsite asymptomatic testing. Every staff member and student should have the opportunity to be tested for COVID-19. We are asking that the Government and Public Health expand the asymptomatic testing to every school in York Region beginning with those schools currently experiencing high numbers of cases or consistently seeing cases.

For our schools to be safe the people of Ontario need adequate supports to keep community spread down. This includes paid sick and family care leave as well as immediate and easily accessible income supports for parents who need to stay home with quarantining children.

In order to ensure that students are receiving the best possible education during this pandemic, it is imperative that the Government fund schools appropriately. The current funding model precludes the ability of school boards to properly address the increased needs under the pandemic for hiring sufficient teachers/educators, PPE, cleaning resources, proper social distancing, mental health resources, and curriculum resources. Funds that were meant to support students in a brick-and-mortar environment are being expected to now support a brick-

and-mortar and virtual environment. Students attending virtual classes do not have access to appropriate resources including manipulatives, technology and texts.

Ontario is quickly creating a two-tiered Education system within the public education system. Current directives from the Ministry ignore this disparity and make assumptions that every student has access to the same resources. If the Government and Ministry want to ensure that the remainder of the school year is productive and that Ontario eliminates the threat of COVID-19, meaningful drastic financial changes must occur.

Signed by,

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