

REOPENING OF SCHOOLS— REPORT ON MINISTRY OF EDUCATION DISCUSSIONS

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The following report is a summary of the meetings held for the past two weeks.

Week of July 20 - 24

The regularly scheduled calls for the Deputy Minister of Education and All Affiliate Table continued and the Provincial Working Group - Health and Safety resumed this week. Once again, the topics were limited and information shared by the government at the tables was sparse.

The following topics were discussed.

School reopening

Ministry officials continue to be cautiously optimistic that in-person education could resume in September in most areas. Ministry officials shared reopening plans from Alberta and Nova Scotia, and indicated that they had been in touch with those provinces. Both Alberta and Nova Scotia are planning conventional in-school education. While they continued to acknowledge that one month is a long time in a pandemic, they also said they continue to believe that full school reopening is possible for September.

The General Secretaries of the education affiliate unions pressed ministry staff on the necessity of the government to be honest with Ontarians on the government's true intentions in reopening schools and the risks associated with full reopening. We also pressed them on the additional funding that will be necessary if full reopening were to occur.

Provincial Working Group – Health and Safety

Government Officials reiterated that school board plans had to be submitted by August 4, 2020.

Union representatives raised several issues that must be considered by both the government and school boards. These included:

- Transition of high needs students and their safety
- Enough time to prepare for this transition
- Protocol around parents picking up students who become sick

- Understanding how many children will be attending schools come September
- Committee at the local school board level to look at unique situations (i.e. risk assessments, PPE protocols, etc.)
- Additional challenge for French boards who deal with multiple local health authorities
- Work refusals and how they work – noting that the current process has not been modified
- Understanding of who will be driving their kids to school vs. students taking transportation
- Children going into school on alternate days who attend daycares adds risk of exposure
- Additional funding be provided to school boards to help transition kids back to school
- WSIB process for occupational illnesses has not changed and should be adjusted

Redeployment

The Ministry again thanked the unions and all members who put their name forward for assisting in this endeavour. They confirmed that one member had been redeployed and that the need is no longer present for additional redeployments.

Week of July 27 – 31

The regularly scheduled Affiliate General Secretaries, Deputy Minister and Ministry Senior Staff meeting for July 30th was delayed until later in the afternoon to allow the Premier and Minister of Education to make their announcement on school re-opening.

The only item on the agenda for the thirty-minute meeting was school reopening. The General Secretaries took the opportunity to express their deep concern and dismay on the government's choice not to share details of the reopening plan with the affiliates in advance of its release. We also indicated in very strong terms that not having the details shared in advance was deeply troubling. More troubling was our exclusion from the technical briefing prior to the announcement of the reopening plan in which press were invited to.

To the best of our recollection, exclusion from a technical briefing was a first for us, and this represented a new low for this government.

Senior Ministry officials suggested that they might be looking for unspecified amendments to the Central Collective Agreement, to which all affiliates indicated that we have no interest in entertaining any changes. At another Ministry table, we raised a number of concerns and questions with the government's proposed reopening plan including, but not limited to, funding preparation and planning time, safety protocols, training for occasional and temporary staff,

social distancing protocols for students, class sizes in both elementary and secondary, and process for parental opt-out. The overall takeaway is that the Ford government is not interested in real and meaningful consultation with unions representing frontline teachers and education workers.