

OUR SCHOOLS ARE NOT OK

The dam is bursting. COVID-19 cases are rising rapidly across the province. Intensive Care Units are nearing capacity. The Toronto and Peel regions are under the strictest lockdown measures we have faced since the beginning of the pandemic, and others are not far behind.

But Premier Doug Ford and Minister of Education Stephen Lecce continue to claim Ontario's schools are safe, despite thousands of school-related COVID-19 cases, insufficient contact tracing to determine where and how the virus is being passed along, and health and safety protocols that are wildly out of line with the rest of the province.

Ontario's elementary classrooms continue to run at full capacity, without proper physical distancing or ventilation.

In high schools, multiple cohorts of students share classroom space, but our hardworking caretakers have not been adequately supported to ensure sufficient cleaning measures are in place.

Indoor and outdoor dining is prohibited in lockdown areas, while unmasked students eat lunch in classrooms every day.

And there is unclear, inconsistent direction from school boards, public health agencies, and the government about what should happen when a case of COVID-19 is reported in a school.

Teachers are doing everything they can to keep students safe and provide the best possible education. And we want schools to stay open, so students can benefit from interactions with their teachers and their peers. But teachers are stressed, anxious and exhausted, and the situation is at its breaking point.

Adequate safety measures in schools protect everyone – from our hospital workers, to small business owners, to our grandparents. What will it take for the government to listen to the voices of Ontario's teachers?

For the sake of all Ontarians, we need to stop just hoping for the best. We need the Ford government to take action before it is too late.

Liz Stuart

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