

# Guide to Reopening Ontario's Schools

*This document constitutes a return to school direction issued by the Ministry of Education for the purposes of section 5 to Schedule 1 of O.Reg 364/20 (Rules for Stage 3 Areas) originally made under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act and continued under the Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020. This direction has been approved by the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health.*

## Introduction

The guidance provided in this document is intended to support the safe reopening of schools for the 2020/21 school year and has been developed under the following principles:

- Providing a safe and healthy school environment for students, teachers and staff, and safeguarding the broader communities in which they live
- Providing a consistently high-quality education for every student in Ontario
- Addressing potential gaps in student learning, mental health and well-being, arising from the school closures in 2019-20
- Maintaining close communications with and respecting the opinions and authority of parents and reducing barriers to returning to work

On June 19, 2020, the ministry released the Approach to Reopening Schools for the 2020/21 School Year. Since that time, the public health data has changed considerably, with daily confirmed cases significantly declining. This is a positive public health development, and the ministry is now in a position to direct various protocols and procedures for the resumption of school.

The guidance and requirements outlined here build on the guidance released on June 1<sup>9</sup>, 2020 and will continue to be re-evaluated regularly and, where required, updated based on public health advice.

## Executive Summary

Ontario's students, parents, and staff have demonstrated their commitment to learning and resilience ever since the COVID-19 outbreak required everyone involved to embrace new ways of teaching, learning and connecting. However, it was clear that steps needed to be taken to ensure that student and parents' evolving expectations will be met for the Fall.

Over the summer, students and families took advantage of additional learning opportunities offered through expanded summer learning programs across the province. Over 150,000 students enrolled in summer school offerings, including more than 21,000 students who obtained Reach Ahead credits, representing an increase of approximately 70% compared to last summer. While additional enrolment numbers continue to be shared with the Ministry of Education, these preliminary numbers indicate an increased interest on the part of students and families to continue their learning over the summer.

Elementary students participated in literacy and numeracy programs and students with special education needs and mental health concerns are participating in new targeted transition programs in preparation for the coming school year. These programs are helping students to remain on track and start the 2020-21 school year with the confidence and knowledge to succeed.

Students are ready to resume their learning in September, and it is our mission to maximize opportunities for achievement while protecting the mental health and well-being of students. This must be done with health and safety as the fundamental principle.

This September, all elementary schools in the province will open for conventional in-person delivery of teaching and instruction, five days a week. This applies to all Kindergarten to Grade 8 students. Parents will continue to have the option to opt their children out of in-person delivery, which respects the fundamental role of parents in making the final determination whether they feel safe with their children returning to school.

Secondary schools in school boards designated by the province will open on an adapted model, with class cohorts of approximately 15 students, on alternating schedules with at least 50% of in-class instructional days. The designation of these school boards is based on several factors that take into account the size of the school board, the number and size of the board's secondary schools, the size of secondary grade cohorts and whether the board is predominantly urban. Co-terminous boards have also been designated wherever these criteria are met.

This will allow for a staged approach to reopening secondary schools.

Secondary schools in non-designated school boards will be permitted to open with conventional delivery, with enhanced health and safety protocols.

All school boards will adopt timetabling methods that emphasize cohorting of students as much as possible, to limit the number of direct and indirect student-to-student contacts.

Students in Grades 4 to 12 will be required to wear masks indoors on school property. Students may wear their own non-medical masks, and non-medical masks will also be made available for students. Reasonable exceptions on the requirement to wear masks will apply.

Students in Kindergarten to Grade 3 will be encouraged but not required to wear masks in indoor spaces.

School-based staff who are regularly in close contact with students will be provided with all appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

The Ontario government will provide PPE and cleaning products to school boards and will work closely with boards to facilitate appropriate supply and delivery.

Most schools in Ontario will open for students on September 8, 2020. Ministry expectation is that school boards have scheduled three days of professional activity prior to September 8. All school-based staff, including supply/occasional teachers and occasional staff, will be required to participate in a one day paid health and safety training prior to the opening of schools.

The Ontario government is supporting the re-opening of schools with \$309 million in new investments to ensure a safe return, including funding for:

- Up to 500 public health nurses, phased in, to assist schools and boards in local health protocols;
- masks and personal protective equipment;
- additional teaching positions;
- additional school custodians and enhanced cleaning supplies;
- cleaning for school buses and personal protective equipment for bus drivers;
- additional supports for students with special education needs;

- additional health and safety training for school-based staff
- increased funding for mental health supports.
- funding for testing

This funding is in addition to the \$25 million investment in mental health and technology, which will see an additional \$10 million dedicated to mental health staff, resources, and programs; \$15 million in technology funding to support the procurement of up to 35,000 devices for Ontario's students to support their synchronous learning in-school and beyond; and \$4 million in new funding for cleaning, cleaning protocols, and financial support to hire additional custodial staff.

In addition, the ministry is working with colleagues in the Ministry of Health to ensure public health capacity will be expanded to support school reopening, including public health nurses and expanded lab capacity for testing.

### **Elementary**

Elementary schools will reopen with conventional in-person delivery of teaching and instruction, with enhanced health and safety protocols, provincewide.

Elementary school students in Kindergarten through Grade 8 will attend school five days per week, with 300 minutes of instruction per day, remaining in one cohort for the full day, including recess and lunch. Cohorted classes will stay together and with one teacher, where possible. Students can expect to see changes in the timing of recesses, lunches, and bathroom breaks as they are staggered to support cohorting. Specialized teachers, like French teachers, will still be able to go into classrooms to provide the full breadth of programming for students. Students will also be able to leave their classrooms to receive additional supports but direct and indirect contacts in schools for students should be limited to approximately 50.

School boards will provide the full range of elementary curriculum, including the new Grades 1-8 Mathematics curriculum.

### **Secondary**

#### ***Designation Status for Secondary Delivery***

Secondary schools will open in September with conventional or adapted in-person teaching and instruction, depending upon the designation of the school board.

The designation of these school boards is based on several factors that take into account the size of the school board, the number and size of the board's secondary schools, the size of secondary grade cohorts and whether the board is predominantly urban. Co-terminous boards have also been designated wherever these criteria are met.

This will allow for a staged approach to reopening secondary schools. The designation status of school boards will be reviewed regularly to support a future transition into a conventional delivery model when it is safe and appropriate to do so.

24 school boards will have designated status for reopening in September. The list of designated school boards is below.

Designated school boards will be given notice to move to conventional delivery when it is determined that it is safe to do so. This will allow for advance notice to parents and students to ensure they are prepared for a return, and for schools to prepare for transitioning to conventional delivery.

Secondary schools in designated school boards will open on an adapted model, with class cohorts of approximately 15 students, attending on alternate schedules that would include in person attendance for at least 50% of instructional days.

Secondary school students in an adapted model would be assigned curriculum-linked independent work on remote learning days and, where possible, would participate in synchronous learning with their teacher and classmates for a period of each school day. To facilitate this, boards may wish to adjust the school day for students in an adapted model.

Even in designated school boards, students with a high level of special education needs may need daily attendance and instruction. The Ministry of Education will liaise with designated school boards in support of this goal and will review and approve requests by designated school boards to open small or specialized secondary schools or programs with full time attendance.

Designated school boards:

- Toronto
- Toronto Catholic
- Peel
- Dufferin-Peel Catholic
- York
- York Catholic
- Durham
- Durham Catholic
- Halton
- Halton Catholic
- Waterloo
- Waterloo Catholic
- Thames Valley
- London Dist. Catholic
- Ottawa-Carleton
- Ottawa Catholic
- Hamilton-Wentworth
- Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic
- Niagara
- Niagara Catholic
- Greater Essex County
- Windsor-Essex Catholic
- Conseil des écoles catholiques du Centre-Est
- Conseil des écoles publiques du Centre-Est

## ***Timetabling and Cohorting***

Ontario's 880 secondary schools have enrolments that range from under 50 students to over 2000.

All school boards are encouraged to adopt secondary timetabling methods that emphasize cohorting of students as much as possible, to limit the number of student-to-student contacts.

In order to reduce risk of transmission and to support contact tracing, school boards are to develop timetables that over a 1 to 2-week period:

- Limit indirect and direct student contacts to approximately 100 students in the school; and
- Are encouraged to keep secondary school students in a maximum of two in-person class cohorts

A secondary school credit is granted in recognition of the successful completion of a scheduled 110 hour course. Efforts to cohort secondary school students may impact the traditional four course delivery model in a semestered school and as a result, boards may need to adjust the school day for students. As outlined in [Ontario Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Program Requirements, 2016](#), *“planned learning activities include interaction between the teacher and the student and assigned individual or group work...”*

In the conventional model, a school board should provide no less than a 5-hour instructional day through in-person or synchronous remote learning. In an adapted model, school boards may wish to implement a delivery model that includes shortening the in-class school day for secondary students, utilizing asynchronous or synchronous remote learning and independent study to achieve the 110 hours of instruction.

School boards across Ontario are preparing for this form of timetabling by introducing innovations such as a quadmester model, where students take two credits at a time, spending the morning on one subject and the afternoon on a second subject, with four segments to the school year. The model for conventional and adapted (example quadmester) should be the same model. The difference is the size of the cohort.

Another option, in smaller secondary schools, is to cohort grades of students and ensure that only students in a specific grade are in classes with each other.

The Ontario high school curriculum allows for students to typically take one elective in Grade 9, and up to three electives in Grade 10. School boards should work to restrict secondary students in these grades to cohorts and maintain students in full-time, in-class delivery.

Cohorting may become more challenging in Grades 11 and 12. Ontario school boards are introducing innovative timetables that allow students to take the same range of other classes through remote delivery.

Referred to as the “study hall model”, this would allow students to remain cohorted with the same group of classmates while they take a range of courses. This would require students to have relevant technological devices to complete their studies. The teachers delivering the courses may be in the same school, but leading their students through synchronous delivery

and assigned work. A class of students in study hall might be taking a range of courses during the same class period.

Ontario school boards are preparing for the upcoming school year with a range of innovative timetabling approaches that support good pedagogy, follow public health advice and respect their collective agreements with teachers. The Ministry of Education, Ontario's school board trustee associations and Ontario's teacher unions continue to discuss implementation of these approaches.

### **Adult and Continuing Education**

Delivery options for programs offered by boards through Adult and Continuing Education such as International Languages, Adult Credit and Literacy and Numeracy, may vary in approach - in alignment with this guidance document - to include remote, in person or hybrid models taking in to account the health and safety of students.

### **Protection Strategies**

Building on the health and safety guidance released on June 19, 2020, school boards will be expected to employ **multiple strategies**, informed by public health advice and jurisdictional research, to ensure schools are healthy and safe environments for students and staff.

The [COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan](#) can help prepare school boards to put controls into place that help make schools safer for everyone.

### **Self-Screening**

All staff and students must self-screen every day before attending school. School boards should provide parents with a checklist to perform daily screening of their children before arriving at school and self-assessment tools should be made available to staff to ensure awareness of possible symptoms of COVID-19. Signs should be posted at entrances to the school to remind students, staff, parents/caregivers, and essential visitors of screening requirements. If a student or staff member is experiencing any [symptoms of COVID-19](#), they must stay home from school and should seek testing and appropriate medical attention.

The ministry is also working with public health officials to ensure a supply of public health nurses to assist schools across the province, including assistance with screening of potential cases of COVID-19.

All staff and students who are experiencing new or worsening symptoms consistent with COVID-19 must not attend school and should seek appropriate medical attention as required, including getting tested at a COVID-19 testing centre.

Staff and students feeling sick should remain at home while waiting for test results. If a symptomatic individual tests positive for COVID-19, they should continue to remain in isolation at home and follow the directions of their local public health unit.

## **Adapted School Environments**

School boards will be expected to adapt their school environments, both physically and operationally, to support the multiple protection strategies available.

This can include posting signs to reinforce self-screening and hand hygiene, directional signage to support distancing and one-way use of hallways, adjustments to entrance and exit practices, adjustments to the use of playgrounds and school grounds, signage in bathrooms and common areas to indicate maximum capacity and availability of hand sanitizer.

## **Hand Hygiene**

Appropriate hand hygiene is one of the most important protective strategies. Schools should be prepared to train students on appropriate hand hygiene, including the use of alcohol-based hand rub, and to reinforce its use.

This can involve scheduling breaks to allow students to wash their hands at appropriate times during the school day.

## **Masks**

### ***Students***

Students in Grades 4 to 12 will be required to wear non-medical or cloth masks indoors in school, including in hallways and during classes. Outdoor times like recess can be used as opportunities to provide students with breaks from wearing masks within their cohorts.

Students in Kindergarten to Grade 3 will be encouraged but not required to wear masks in indoor spaces.

Students are encouraged to practice wearing masks and learn what type of mask is most comfortable for them. Students may wear their own non-medical masks, and non-medical masks will also be made available for students. Reasonable exceptions on the requirement to wear masks will apply.

### ***Teachers and Staff***

Medical masks and eye protection (i.e. face shield) will be provided for all teachers and other staff of school boards. All school-based staff will be required to wear masks, with reasonable exceptions for medical conditions.

School-based staff who are regularly in close contact with students will be provided with all appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

The Ontario government will provide PPE and cleaning products to school boards and will work closely to ensure appropriate supply and delivery where necessary, such as in leading classes with students who are deaf or hard of hearing, masks with clear sections may be appropriate.

### ***Exceptions***

Reasonable exceptions to the requirement to wear masks are expected to be put in place by schools and school boards.

Staff or students with sensory or breathing difficulties may be exempted by the school principal, guided by school board policies.

### ***Supply of Masks and PPE***

Masks and other PPE have been sourced by the Ontario government. The ministry will work closely with school boards to confirm demand and facilitate timely delivery and supply.

### ***Cohorting***

Cohorting refers to the practice of keeping students together in a small group throughout their school day, with limited exposure to multiple teachers or a wide variety of classmates.

This practice limits the number of other students that a single student is in contact with. This practice will also facilitate contact tracing should that be necessary.

School boards will be expected to implement adapted timetables at both the elementary and secondary levels that support cohorting of students to the greatest extent possible.

An elementary student should be cohorted with their classmates and their homeroom teacher, with limited contact with other subject teachers for classes such as French as a second language/Anglais, the arts and physical education.

A secondary student should be limited to approximately 100 student contacts. Boards are also encouraged to keep in-person cohorts to two classes, or with their grade, depending on the size of their high school. As discussed in the Secondary Schools section, this may require adapted timetables and a study hall or remote delivery of some classes in Grades 11 and 12 to limit the size of the cohort a secondary student is exposed to.

The ministry has been engaged in discussions with trustee associations, school boards and teacher federations on student timetables that achieve the goals of appropriate pedagogy, cohorting and respect for collective agreements.

### ***Distancing***

As much distancing as possible between students, between students and staff and between staff members should always be promoted. Physical distancing measures are to be supplemented with other public health measures supported by health and safety strategies, such as screening, adapted school environment, cohorting, hand hygiene, enhanced cleaning and masking.

Classroom sizes in Ontario schools vary in size, but schools are encouraged to remove unnecessary furniture and place desks with as much distancing as possible, and to allow

teachers as much teaching space as possible. Desks should face forward rather than in circles or groupings.

Schools are encouraged to locate larger classes in larger spaces and to use all available space in a school, including gyms and libraries.

### **Visitors**

In the upcoming school year, schools are asked to significantly limit or even prohibit visitors, including parents.

Visits to ensure school safety, such as inspections by the Fire Marshal's office or by public health, should continue to take place.

Any visitors to a school should be required to self-screen and to wear a medical mask while on school premises.

Local protocols for school access by regulated health professionals, regulated social service professionals and paraprofessionals for the purpose of delivering school-based supports and services should be developed with any external community-based agencies providing these supports and services. See "Special Education" below.

### **Pre-Registration**

School boards are encouraged to undertake pre-registration given the controlled conditions for reopening schools that will be required.

School boards will be permitted to wait-list students and families who do not pre-register by a cut-off time established by the board. Boards should make their pre-registration deadlines publicly available. Boards will be permitted to offer these students and families remote learning until an appropriate class placement can be provided.

School boards may set restrictions on the ability of students to transfer between remote learning and in class learning. These restrictions may take the form of a limited number of dates in the school calendar for transfer between these forms of learning, such as the end of a semester or quadmester.

### **Staffing**

As employers, school boards are encouraged to work with their teacher federations and education worker unions as they develop their reopening plans.

A key aspect of these plans will be defining criteria for accommodation for staff who have health conditions, or whose family members have health conditions, that would make it preferable for them to work in accommodated roles.

Boards are encouraged to develop supply lists to support continuity of learning and operations when teachers or staff complete their daily self-screening and choose to stay home.

## ***Special Education***

In order to ensure that students with special education needs are supported as schools reopen, school boards will need to consider additional planning and transition time for students with special education needs to support a smooth transition.

School boards should support attendance options including offering daily attendance to students with special education needs for whom adapted timetables or remote learning may be challenging based on student needs.

School boards should make changes in the school environment and/or remote learning needs when reviewing and updating Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and to ensure continued access to assistive technology.

The safe return of medically fragile students will be supported by boards consulting with local public health authorities on options for personal protective equipment, staff training, and potential continued remote learning where return is not possible. Students and parent/guardians should also consult with their health care providers.

School boards should work with partners to develop local protocols for school access by regulated health professionals, regulated social service professionals and paraprofessionals for the purpose of delivering school-based supports and services. Protocols should include support for remote delivery where in-school delivery is not possible.

## ***Mental Health***

Mental health and well-being are core elements of the school reopening plan.

Prior to school starting, [School Mental Health Ontario](#) will provide school boards with a professional learning framework and toolkit to support the mental health of all students that can be tailored at the board and school level for different audiences. The professional learning will have a strong focus on building students' social-emotional learning skills so that they can build resilience, manage their stress and build positive relationships. Professional learning will be provided for system leaders, educators and mental health professionals to support the approach to school re-entry, as well as throughout the school year.

School boards should implement a tiered approach for mental health supports that will capture all students and target intensive help to those who have been most affected by the COVID-19 outbreak.

School boards should collaborate with child and youth mental health agencies to support strong connections and make the best use of mental health resources and supports across the integrated system of care.

## ***Academics***

Beginning in September, students should be supported in transitioning to their next grade or course, acknowledging the prolonged absence of students from the classroom. Part of this

support should include assessments to identify students' strengths and gaps in learning at key instructional times to ensure students have fundamental building blocks in advance of new content. The primary purpose of instruction and assessment is to raise the skill level of all learners in their achievement of overall curriculum expectations across all subjects, courses, and grades.

Schools should design elementary timetables to maximize learning opportunities, including math, science, language, social studies, health and physical education, French as a second language/Anglais, and the arts in accordance with the 300-minute instructional day. Students in Grades 3 and 6 will not participate in EQAO assessments in the 2020-21 school year.

It is important that any approach allows secondary students to earn compulsory credits required for the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), as well as providing access to types of elective courses that support all postsecondary pathway destinations. Timetabling of pre-requisite Grade 12 courses should consider post-secondary application and admission deadlines.

For those students graduating before February 2021 who have not yet met the literacy graduation requirement, they should be enrolled in the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC) or an adjudication process. Graduating students will also need to meet the 40-hour community involvement graduation requirement and can do so virtually.

Adaptations may be needed for some subjects/courses to ensure the safety of students, in line with current public health recommendations.

### ***Music***

Most overall expectations for the Music strand can be met without the use of instruments in both the elementary and secondary Arts curriculum.

A variety of delivery options may be considered to meet the music curriculum's overall expectations, which could include fully distanced learning, in-person teaching and instruction with lower-risk creative performance opportunities (e.g., in-school instruction in larger spaces, restricting the type of instruments in a group setting) or in-person teaching and instruction with no live performance.

Boards may choose to refer to the [Ontario Music Educators' Association](#) resource for suggestions on teaching music in line with current public health recommendations.

### ***Health and Physical Education***

In elementary and applicable secondary Health and Physical Education courses, efforts should be made to address the overall expectations of the Active Living and Movement Competence

strands outside, whenever possible. Gymnasiums should only be used where physical distancing measures can be followed. Capacity in change rooms should be limited.

Teachers should plan physical activities that support physical distancing while also limiting the use of shared equipment. Shared equipment should be disinfected regularly and students should be encouraged to practice proper hand hygiene before and after participating in physical activity and equipment use. Boards may choose to refer to Physical & Health Education (PHE) Canada's resource or the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (Ophea) website for suggestions on teaching physical education in line with current public health recommendations.

### ***Cooperative Education***

Co-op placements should be offered virtually, where feasible. In-person community placements can be arranged in alignment with the direction and recommendations of the local health unit, the direction of the school board, and with the safety and curriculum requirements of the Cooperative Education curriculum. Cooperative education is a key component of Specialist High Skills Majors, the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program and Dual Credit Programs.

### ***Technological Education***

A variety of delivery options may be considered to meet technological education curriculum expectations, which could include fully distanced learning, in-school instruction with lower-risk face to face learning opportunities in technological education classes. This will vary widely between the 10 Broad Based Technology areas in the Technological Education curriculum. Technological education classroom cohorts must be designed to meet all physical distancing practices as well as health and safety precautions. Boards may choose to refer to Ontario Council for Technology Education's website for suggestions on teaching technological education in line with current public health recommendations and in virtual environments.

### **Resources:**

[OMEA's Considerations for Safe Reopening](#)

[PHE Canada's Return to School PHE Guidelines](#)

### ***Field Trips***

To align with physical distancing, schools should not plan field trips and activities requiring group transportation at this time, until public health data suggests otherwise.

### ***Clubs and Sports***

Schools can offer clubs and organized sports if physical distancing is possible and equipment and spaces are cleaned and disinfected between each use.

### ***School Assemblies***

School assemblies or other large gatherings (e.g., concerts or dances) should be avoided. Virtual options should be offered instead of in person gatherings.

### **Other Scenarios**

#### ***Voluntary Learn at Home***

To ensure students and families are supported and respected in making decisions that work best for them, in-person school attendance will be optional for the 2020/21 school year. If not attending in-person, students will be expected to attend school remotely.

Remote learning options will be available for all students on a full-time enhanced distant/remote learning basis with access to learning materials posted online to support both synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities during the day.

For students who are engaged in remote learning, attendance should be taken according to the school's daily protocol. Students should be provided with a daily schedule of subjects/courses according to a 5-hour instructional day with opportunities for frequent, live contact with a teacher and expectations for synchronous learning. It is expected that learning will be based on overall expectations across all subjects/courses and grades.

Key times will be identified when parents can choose to reintegrate their child to in-person instruction, when they feel comfortable to do so.

The ministry will support these students being reported for full enrolment funding and boards should ensure that teachers are available and assigned to classes.

For secondary students, online courses delivered through a fully independent learning model are also available through the TVO Independent Learning Centre (ILC); over 140 courses are available in both English and French. School boards are required to approve student enrolment in ILC courses and school boards must pay a \$250 per credit fee to TVO. All reasonable requests by students for independent study should be supported and students should be able to access guidance counsellors to confirm that credits support their academic pathway.

#### ***Adapted Delivery***

School boards should be prepared to implement their adapted delivery models should public health conditions require them. Under this scenario, cohorts would include approximately 15 students in each class attending on alternate days, or alternate schedules that would represent in person attendance for at least 50% of instructional days.

#### ***Full Remote Delivery***

School boards should ensure that all teachers have an account on Brightspace or board selected Learning Management System (LMS).

Teachers should be prepared to load learning resources in this LMS and to deliver synchronous learning for part of each school day.

School boards should be prepared to have a calendar and timetable prepared by grade and respect that families with multiple children may need to take turns using the family's devices or broadband access.

To support teachers in teaching through remote delivery, the Ministry has developed with partners a catalogue of over 125 online courses in both English and French, in addition to the courses provided through the Independent Learning Centre. The ministry is continuing to develop new online courses and 10 new courses are being developed for September, with another 10 by January, in French and English.

Should remote delivery be required, wherever possible, schools will remain open as workplaces for teachers, to support the delivery of high-quality synchronous learning.

Boards should assess whether there are students who need access to a device or internet and take steps to distribute school resources to ensure students can stay connected, wherever possible, to learning. Boards should also make sure that students with disabilities have access to accessible online learning.

Where internet access is unavailable or limited, school boards should consider opening schools to students on a supervised study hall basis even when full school operations are not possible. Public health advice would be required to implement this.

## **Transportation**

Active forms of travel (e.g., walking and cycling) and private transportation by parents and caregivers, are encouraged where possible, to ease pressure on transportation demand.

To support return to school 5 days a week, school boards may be required to increase the utilization of buses beyond one student per seat and operate closer to capacity. To the extent that physical distancing may not be possible, the use of non-medical masks for students in Grades 4 to 12 will be required on school vehicles. Students in Kindergarten to Grade 3 will be encouraged but not required to wear masks on student transportation. Exceptions should be made for students with medical conditions or special needs that prevent masking.

Students should be assigned seats and a record of the seating plan should be kept to assist with contact tracing in the case of a student or driver contracting COVID-19. Students who live in the same household or are in the same classroom cohort should be seated together.

Medical masks and eye protection (i.e. face shields) will be provided for school bus drivers, school bus monitors and student aides. Eye protection for drivers should not interfere with the safe operation of vehicles and is intended to protect drivers during close contact with students, such as during boarding and exiting

The province has enhanced funding to support increased disinfecting protocols for frequently touched surfaces (e.g., handrails, seatbacks) to at least twice daily. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer should be available on vehicles.

Where possible, the seat directly behind the school bus driver should remain empty to maintain physical distancing. Windows should be opened when feasible to increase ventilation.

School boards should support accommodations for immunocompromised and otherwise medically vulnerable students, and students with special transportation needs (e.g., arrange separate vehicle, assign seating at front of school bus).

Training, where appropriate, to support school bus drivers, school bus monitors, and student aides should be provided to ensure that health and safety measures are understood, followed and enforced.

Health and safety measures should be clearly communicated to parents and guardians of students to ensure their comfort with the adapted transportation system and receive their support in having students understand and follow guidelines.

Student transportation service providers should also consider the [Health and Safety Guidance During COVID-19 for Student Transportation Employers](#) released by the Public Services Health and Safety Association.

#### **More Resources:**

[Federal Guidance for School Bus Operations](#)

#### **Monitoring and Responding to Reports of COVID-19 Symptoms**

The Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and Public Health will work closely with school boards to monitor and respond to reports of COVID-19 symptoms.

Any student or staff member who develops COVID-19 symptoms while in school should be immediately separated from others, in a separate room where possible, until they are able to go home. They should not take student or public transportation. Isolated students should be supervised per usual school policy, with physical distancing maintained and PPE provided consistent with health guidance.

Staff with symptoms and parents/guardians of children with symptoms should be directed to use the online self-assessment tool and follow instructions. Persons who test positive may not return to school until they are cleared according to public health guidance. Persons who retest

negative (after an initial positive test) can return to school once they are symptom-free for 24 hours.

Schools must ensure records of classes, including seating charts, bus cohorts, and daily records of any approved visitors to the school, including supply/occasional teachers or custodians are maintained and readily available to be provided to public health for contact tracing purposes.

Schools must immediately report any suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 within the school to the local public health unit and provide any materials (e.g., daily attendance and transportation records) to public health officials to support case management and contact tracing and other activities in accordance with all applicable legislation, including the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. Public health officials will determine any additional steps required, including but not limited to the declaration of an outbreak and closure of classes and/or schools. School boards must report on a daily basis any suspected or confirmed cases within the school community to the ministry. An online tool will be available for this purpose and no personal information will be collected by the ministry. Principals are responsible for communicating with the school community consistent with ministry guidance and relevant privacy legislation.

Principals must maintain a dedicated contact in the local public health unit and a list of the locations of the closest [COVID-19 assessment sites](#).

All school staff must receive training on outbreak management procedures.

### **Before and After School Programs**

Before and after school programming will be available and students in these programs would be part of two cohorts. Schools, child care operators and authorized recreation providers in schools will collaborate to ensure that student lists and information are maintained and readily available to be provided to public health for contact tracing purposes in accordance with all applicable legislation, including the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.

### **Communication to Parents**

The success of the school reopening plan will depend on parents being informed about new protocols and feeling confident that the approach will keep their children safe. To that end, boards should clearly communicate expectations and provide guidelines to parents and students well before in-class instruction resumes, and ongoing throughout the year.

### **Provincial and Demonstration Schools**

The Ministry of Education operates nine schools, including both schools and residences. These schools serve students who are deaf or hard of hearing, blind or low vision, deaf-blind, or who have severe learning disabilities.

Two of these schools are in the process of transferring to being governed by Ontario's French language school boards.

Separate and detailed guidance for the re-opening of these schools is being developed and will be shared with parents and students.

### **Private Schools**

Private schools should adopt the guidance in this document. They are encouraged to work with their public health unit in developing their school reopening plans.

Private schools must immediately report any suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 within the school to the local public health unit as required under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*, and provide any materials (e.g., daily attendance and transportation records) to public health officials to support case management and contact tracing and other activities, in accordance with all applicable privacy legislation. Public health officials will determine any additional steps required. Private schools must also report on a daily basis about any suspected or confirmed cases to the ministry. An online tool will be available for this purpose and no personal information will be collected by the ministry.

Private schools located in Stage 3 regions of the province can reopen (see O.Reg 364/20 under the *Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020*).

### **First Nations**

First Nations schools located in regions of the province in Stage 3 of re-opening should adopt the guidance in this document. Schools are encouraged to work with their public health unit in reopening their schools.

Only private schools, including First Nations schools, located in Stage 3 regions of the province are allowed to reopen (see O.Reg 364/20 under the *Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020*).

### **International Students**

Some Ontario school boards serve international students. The decision of whether to admit international students for the coming school year rests with the federal government. Should the federal government decide to admit international students, it is expected that Ontario school boards will follow all federal guidance with respect to their admission.

### **Health and Safety**

It is the employer's responsibility under the [Occupational Health and Safety Act](#) to take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances to protect a worker.

### **Training**

Staff should be provided with a full day of training on the health and safety protocols and required adaptations before the school year begins. This training will be provided to all staff

including supply/occasional teachers and casual workers, which the government has invested \$10 million to provide.

### ***Joint Health and Safety Committees***

Joint Health and Safety Committees are required to be established, engaged and meeting regularly to inform the reopening plan and ongoing operations.

### ***Adapted School Environment***

Schools should develop school arrival and departure procedures that support physical distancing where possible. Approaches may include:

- Staggered bell times
- Maximizing the use of all possible entrances/exits to support the beginning and end of the school days

Hand sanitizer should be available in school entrances and exits and in classrooms.

Schools should create designated routes for students to get to and from classrooms, including different and separate entrance points for students in different grades.

Schools should also provide visual cues/physical guides, such as tape on floors or sidewalks and signs/posters on walls, to guide appropriate distances in lines/queues and at other times (e.g., guides for creating “one-way routes” in hallways).

Periods of student movement should be staggered to limit student congregation in the hallways.

Congregation of teachers/staff should be limited to minimize potential for adult-to-adult transmission.

Special consideration for physical distancing should be taken for classrooms with fixed equipment (e.g. Science labs or technological education classrooms).

### **Cleaning Standards and protocols**

#### ***Cleaning Protocols***

School boards should review their cleaning protocols and reinforce them if needed to meet current public health requirements.

Refer to Public Health Ontario's [Environmental Cleaning fact sheet \(PDF\)](#).

Refer to Health Canada's [Hard-surface disinfectants and hand sanitizers \(COVID-19\)](#) for approved products.

- **Cleaning products:** Products that provide both the cleaning and disinfection action are preferable due to ease of use (e.g., hydrogen peroxide products). Only use cleaning and disinfectant products that have a Drug Identification Number (DIN). Check the expiry date of the agents prior to use. These should be used according to the manufacturer's instructions
- **Cleaning program:** School boards should develop a program for cleaning and disinfecting schools, including reviews of:
  - Existing practices to determine where enhancements might be made, including frequency and timing of cleaning and disinfection, areas to clean and/or disinfect, choice of cleaning products, child safety, staffing, signage, and PPE for cleaning staff
  - Inventory to determine items to be stored, moved, or removed altogether to reduce handling or the challenges associated with cleaning them (e.g., porous or soft items such as stuffed toys, area rugs, fabric upholstered seating)
- **High touch surfaces:** Cleaning plus disinfection twice daily is suggested at a minimum, however, more frequent cleaning and disinfection may be necessary, depending on the frequency of use and extent of soilage
  - Includes washrooms (e.g. toilet fixtures, faucets), eating areas (e.g. tables, sinks, countertops), doorknobs, light switches, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, touch screens, push buttons, handrails, computers, photocopiers, sports equipment
- **Outdoor surfaces:** Routine cleaning of surfaces on playgrounds, including high touch surfaces made of plastic or metal requires soap and water but not disinfectant. Cleaning of wooden surfaces is not recommended
- **Shared objects:** Use of shared objects (e.g., gym or physical education equipment, art supplies, toys, games) should be limited when possible, or the objects should be cleaned between each use
- **Where an individual is suspected of having COVID-19 at school:**
  - Establish a protocol for identification and communication of suspected/confirmed cases to administration and relevant staff to determine contaminated areas and carry out cleaning and disinfection, including timing, return to use, methods, PPE, waste disposal
  - Identify areas that may require cleaning plus disinfection (items used by the individual and all surfaces within 2 metres of the ill person) versus cleaning alone (such as a hallway or room where the individual has passed through)
  - Use disposable cleaning equipment, such as disposable wipes, where possible
  - Remove all items that cannot be cleaned (paper, books, etc.) and store them in a sealed container for a minimum of 7 days

### ***Water Testing***

Schools are required to follow all Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks requirements and procedures regarding water flushing in advance of schools reopening.

### **Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette**

Refer to Public Health Ontario's [How to Wash Your Hands \(PDF\)](#) fact sheet.

Refer to Health Canada's [Hard-surface disinfectants and hand sanitizers \(COVID-19\): List of hand sanitizers authorized by Health Canada](#), including which sanitizers may be appropriate for different groups of staff and students.

- Hand hygiene refers to hand washing or hand sanitizing to remove or kill the virus and is the most effective way to reduce the transmission of organisms.
- Respiratory etiquette aims to reduce the risk of transmitting droplets that may contain the virus directly onto other surfaces where they may be picked up by others.
- Education: Staff and students should be provided with targeted, age-appropriate education in proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette. Local public health units can provide additional guidance. Age-appropriate posters or signage should be placed around the school.
- Supplies: Staff and students should have the supplies they need to conduct appropriate hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette and these supplies should be easily accessible.
- **Alcohol Based Hand Rub (ABHR)** with a minimum 60% alcohol concentration (60-90% recommended in community settings) throughout the school (including ideally at the entry point to each classroom) and/or **plain liquid soap** in dispensers, sinks and paper towels in dispensers.
  - Soap and water are preferred as it is the most effective method and least likely to cause harm if accidentally ingested
  - ABHR can be used by children. It is most effective when hands are not visibly soiled
  - For any dirt, blood, body fluids (urine/feces), it is preferred that hands be washed with soap and water to remove this “organic material”
  - Safe placement of the ABHR to avoid consumption is important, especially for young children
- **Tissues** and **lined, no-touch waste baskets** (i.e., foot pedal-operated, hand sensor, open basket).
- **Support or modifications** allowing students with special needs to regularly perform hand hygiene as independently as possible.
- Hand hygiene should be conducted by anyone entering the school and incorporated into the daily schedule at regular intervals during the day, above and beyond what is usually recommended (e.g., before eating food, after using the washroom).
- Possible options would be to have regular scheduled hand hygiene breaks based on a pre-specified schedule
- Students may need assistance or supervision

### ***Bathrooms***

Schools should ensure that bathrooms are cleaned frequently and that there is an adequate supply of soap at all times. Paper hand towels are preferable to hand dryers.

Schools should timetable bathroom breaks in the school day to stagger use of bathrooms and should monitor physical distancing. Signage should be posted that indicates the maximum number of people simultaneously using the bathroom at any given point. Individual students should not be prevented from accessing bathrooms as needed.

### **Isolation Room**

All schools have a room that can be used should a student or staff member become ill, including PPE available in the room.

These rooms should be cleaned after each use.

### **Lunch/Food Service**

To the greatest extent possible, students should be encouraged to eat lunch in their classroom with their cohort to ensure chances of contact and transmission are minimized.

Lunch times should be staggered to allow students to wash hands before eating, without creating congestion in washrooms or handwashing stations.

If weather permits, consideration could be given to having lunch breaks outside.

With respect to eating and drinking at school, it is expected that:

- Staff and students will perform proper hand hygiene before and after eating.
- Each student will have their own individual meal or snack with no common food items.
- Each student will be required to bring their own drink bottle that is labeled, kept with them during the day and not shared.
- Water bottles will be required to be filled rather than students and staff drinking directly from the mouthpiece of water fountains
- Schools will remove all self-serving food items and microwave use will not be permitted.
- Multi-use utensils will be cleaned after each use.
- Schools will not plan non-instructional activities that involve students in preparing or serving of food.
- Third party food services, including nutrition programs, will be delivered in a way that any student who wishes to participate can do so. “Grab and Go format” is preferred. All surfaces, bins and containers for food should be disinfected prior to and after each use.

### **Rules for personal belongings**

Personal belongings brought to school should be minimized.

Personal items being brought to school (e.g., backpack, clothing, sun protection, water bottles, food) should be labeled and stored separately in cubbies/designated areas or lockers.

### **New Funding Investments**

- The Ontario government is supporting the re-opening of schools through \$309 million in new funding for a range of investments, including:
  - Up to 500 public health nurses, phased in to assist schools and boards in local health protocols - \$50M
  - Masks and personal protective equipment - \$60M
  - Additional teaching positions - \$30M
  - Additional school custodians and enhanced cleaning supplies - \$75M
  - Cleaning for school buses and personal protective equipment for bus drivers - \$40M

- Additional supports for students with special education needs - \$10M
- Additional health and safety training for school-based staff - \$10M
- Increased funding for mental health supports - \$10M
- Testing - \$23.6M

This funding is in addition to the \$25 million investment in mental health and technology, which will see an additional \$10 million dedicated to mental health staff, resources, and programs; \$15 million in technology funding to support the procurement of up to 35,000 devices for Ontario's students to support their synchronous learning in-school and beyond; and \$4 million in new funding for cleaning, cleaning protocols, and financial support to hire additional custodial staff.