

Memo #11

Date: January 6, 2022

To: Members

Re: **Ministry Announcements and the Move to Remote Learning**

Ministry Announcements and the Move to Remote Learning

A few short weeks ago we believed we would be welcoming a New Year that would be much different than the last. Instead, we find ourselves again navigating a new, but all too familiar phase of this pandemic.

The escalating circumstances in this province since mid-December have been concerning to everyone but our Provincial Government. This reached an apex of absurdity with the announcement by Dr. Kieran Moore last week. What has transpired since then has been an immense outcry across all demographics - parents, grandparents, students, healthcare, and education workers - critical of the decision to return students to in-person learning Wednesday January 5th.

It did not need to be this way. The Ministry has had over 600 days to ensure safety measures are in place for our schools, students, and staff. They have refused to take meaningful or proactive steps at every available opportunity. Public reaction and polling have become the only drivers for decision making in this province.

Are you angry? You should be.

If there is one message of hope - *it is that your voice matters*. It is the reaction to last week's announcement that forced this government to rethink their strategy. This has happened time and time again throughout the management of this pandemic. Regular citizens, parents, educators, healthcare workers using their voice in opposition to dangerous policy decisions that impact every facet of our society.

The following will try to address some of the questions, and I am sure further communication will come as discussions occur between OECTA and the Board, and OECTA and the Government.

N95 Masks and PPE

As stated in the government announcement, and after months and months of discussion with the government, non-fitted N95 masks have been ordered with the hopes they will arrive at work locations this week.

The expectation that teachers will have the "option" to wear N95 masks. The non-fitted N95 masks provide superior protection than the medical grade masks.

We have asked how many N95 masks teachers will receive per day. We hope to get an answer today during a meeting with the Board.

It is advised that teachers, if working at a school location, that they wear eyewear (glasses or shield) for an extra layer of protection, as it has been noted many times that the COVID virus is airborne.

We are hearing that Rapid Antigen Tests will be made available to teachers and education, but it has not been confirmed, and OECTA continues to push for this as well.

Work Refusal

This has been something that many members have contacted the Unit Office about in the days leading up to the potential return to school (face-to-face) on Wednesday, January 5th.

The movement to remote learning has only delayed the potential and limited the risk to those who are entering school/work locations. The two weeks should provide the province the time to ensure there are enough non-fitted N95 masks.

However, if you are going to your work location, either as a SERT to support students with special needs, or to access the Board's more reliable internet, you must be provided the option of N95 or the existing medical grade mask. (Again, it is your choice which to use). If the school does not have any N95 masks, which you would prefer to use, you do have the right to refuse work due to an unsafe work environment.

Please refer to the following link that will take you through how to initiate a work refusal and what happens after initiating a work refusal.

https://www.catholicteachers.ca/OECTA/media/pdfs/Communications/Special%20Projects/2020/covid/QuickGuideWorkRefusals_April9.pdf

If you are considering initiating a work refusal, you need to advise the Health & Safety Representative at your school that you are going to initiate a work refusal and contact the Unit Office immediately for assistance.

HEPA Filters

The Board has received, out of the extra 3000 HEPA Filters provided by the government, 35 extra HEPA filters. That is not enough for every classroom to receive one. We are asking for an update from the Board at our meeting today.

The Ministry/Government did not/has not provided additional funding to Boards to purchase HEPA Filters, so the hope is the Board will find money within their budget to provide the required number of HEPA filters.

Communication to Public Health Units and Ministry of Labour

OECTA Simcoe Muskoka Secondary and Elementary have collaborated on communication to our local Public Health Units, and Ministry of Labour outlining the following:

- Prioritize students 5+ years of age for first, second, and third vaccinations as appropriate.
- Prioritize teachers and all education workers for vaccination/booster as appropriate.
- Establish a policy requiring the masking of all students in schools with improved guidelines to ensure masking compliance.
- Make additional rapid antigen tests available to all school staff and students and implement a comprehensive testing and tracking program including proof of negative tests after isolation and before returning to in-person school.
- Require HEPA filter units in all classrooms, in-person learning spaces and office/administration spaces in all schools.

Asynchronous and Synchronous Teaching (PPM 164)

Again, with the movement to remote learning, the government is relying on Policy/Program Memorandum 164 (PPM164) to guide instructional time.

Division	Daily Minimum Synchronous Learning
Kindergarten	180
Primary/Junior	225
Intermediate	225

Synchronous: Learning that happens in real time. Synchronous learning involves using text, video, or voice communication in a way that enables educators and other members of the school- or board-based team to instruct and connect with students in real time.

Asynchronous: Learning that is not delivered in real time. Asynchronous learning may involve students watching pre-recorded video lessons, completing assigned tasks, or contributing to online discussion boards.

As stated in the Board document on Remote Learning: Synchronous learning does not require you to be live and in front of every student for 225 minutes (or 180 minutes in Kindergarten). It is time you are available live to every student, however you may be engaging in instructional activities with specific students, such as small group instruction, providing descriptive feedback, observing students reading etc., where other students are doing independent/group work.

All subjects (except other than Strand A of Mathematics and Health & Physical Education which is to be taught but not assessed) will need to be covered during remote learning. Therefore, classroom teachers should be communicating with the FSL and other itinerant teachers to review a schedule (probably mirroring the face-to-face schedule) that outlines when synchronous and asynchronous time will be provided. The expectation provided by the Board is that all teachers will be both synchronous and asynchronous.

The Board did cancel their Zoom license, but have since notified us that if teachers wish to use Zoom, they are to complete [this Google Form](#) to request a license (**before requesting a license please check to see if you currently have one by signing in here: <https://zoom.us/signin> and using the ‘sign in with Google’ option**).

Emergency Childcare

Emergency childcare is once again being offered to frontline workers who are required to attend work in-person during this current school closure period. This includes employees who are providing in-person support, teaching and instruction to students with special education needs and/or employees who would be required to be on site to support the delivery of this in-person learning.

For more information on locations and to apply to receive this childcare support, please visit the following website(s) and complete an application form as soon as possible.

[County of Simcoe website](#)

[District of Muskoka website](#)

For the District of Parry Sound, please contact the Service Management team at 705-746-7777 ext. 5277.

Isolating or Sick during Remote Learning

We know that we have seen an increase in the number of teachers isolating due to COVID-19. We have also noticed the Board is directing teachers, while isolating, they can continue with their remote duties.

This has been addressed with OECTA Provincial, and it has been confirmed:

Teachers who are off on sick leave should not be expected to teach remotely nor should they volunteer to teach. As for quarantine leave, OECTA's position is that it is a leave of absence from duties and so teachers should not be expected to work.

We have an expectation to provide day plans, and if we are to be off for short or long-term, our past practice has been to provide 3 days of day plans. If teaching remotely, we would provide 3 days of asynchronous work.

It is the Board's responsibility to have trained occasional teachers to teach remotely. Furthermore, much like the government of the day, they have had almost 2 years to address occasional teacher shortages and/or training for occasional teachers in the event of moving to remote learning.

Their emergency is not our problem!

If you have any concerns, please contact the Unit Office at 705-733-9625 or 1 800 558 4815