



**ONTARIO PUBLIC  
SCHOOL BOARDS'  
ASSOCIATION**

**Leading Education's Advocates**

**Ontario Public School Boards' Association**  
439 University Avenue, 18th Floor  
Toronto, ON M5G 1Y8  
Tel: (416) 340-2540  
Fax: (416) 340-7571  
webmaster@opsba.org  
www.opsba.org

Cathy Abraham  
President

W.R. (Rusty) Hick  
Executive Director

May 28, 2021

The Honourable Doug Ford  
Premier of Ontario

Dear Premier:

Throughout the pandemic, the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) has been clear about our position on whether schools across the province should be open to in-person learning. We know that the Minister of Education is well aware of our Association's position on the reopening of schools, however we have taken the opportunity to share this with you following an invitation to do so from the Minister's office.

The safety of our students, staff, and school communities is, and has always been, our top priority. We know the pandemic has had an impact on the mental health and well-being of our children, and as medical experts have said, attending school in-person is crucial to the optimal development of our students. With that in mind, we must do all that is required to ensure our schools are as safe as possible for any return.

Our steadfast position has been that decisions about whether it is safe for students and staff to be in schools should be made by public health experts. We share the perspective of the many public health officials who have stated publicly that schools should be the last to close, and first to open. We know that whatever decision is made, our member school boards will continue to do their best to support students and staff through these challenging times. Should a decision be made to reopen schools, it is essential that school boards be provided with sufficient notice to enable a smooth transition back to in-person learning.

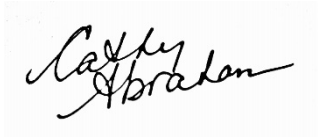
We do know that circumstances across the province have changed since mid-April when many schools shuttered. Case numbers continue to decrease while vaccination rates increase, including those for school-aged children. If deemed safe, a return to in-person learning would end school on a positive note for a year that saw many interruptions. Our schools have shown incredible creativity in finding unique learning opportunities to make things work, including outdoor classrooms, and are prepared to continue this effort. School boards would also continue to offer the choice on remote learning for those students and families who wanted that option.

We continue to support the prioritization of education workers in any vaccination plan. Vaccinating education workers ensures we are supporting their health, safety and well-being, while also minimizing absences from the workplace. This in turn will help keep students in the classroom this fall. We make the same suggestion regarding staff working in school-based child care centres, school bus drivers and any other staff connected to a local school.

As the association representing 31 English public school boards and 10 school authorities across the province, which together serve over 1.3 million students, it is crucial that we have the opportunity to provide our perspective on matters of importance in our sector, such as this.

OPSBA will continue to advocate for the conditions that support and promote student achievement and well-being. We will also work with our education partners and local public health units if and when any final decision is made.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cathy Abraham". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "C".

Cathy Abraham  
President

CC: The Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education  
Nancy Naylor, Deputy Minister  
Jeff Brennan, Director of Stakeholder Relations