Statement from OSBCU on the exception for schools in the second provincial emergency

Laura Walton, president of CUPE's Ontario School Board Council of Unions (OSBCU), gave the following comment following the Ford government's declaration of a second provincial emergency in the face of the growing COVID crisis in Ontario:

> Yesterday the Ford government announced emergency measures designed to slow the spread of COVID-19 in the province, including a tepid stay-at-home order and restrictions on people's mobility.
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> However, schools across the province remain open. Only schools in certain areas will move to virtual learning and even where virtual learning is being offered, students with special needs continue to be given in person instruction. Thousands of CUPE education workers will continue to report to brick-and-mortar schools.
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> We are nearing a year into this pandemic and the Government has failed to institute measures that could flatten the curve. There is no comprehensive contact tracing. There is insufficient testing, particularly in schools where students are often asymptomatic. The personal protective equipment (PPE) provided is inadequate. It is not terribly shocking that we are seeing unprecedented numbers of cases. However, it is disappointing that the government continues to place the burden for slowing the curve entirely on individuals.
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> CUPE is calling on the government to increase testing in schools. In areas where the schools are closed to all but the students with special needs, we are asking that those students be tested. We are also asking for the same PPE offered to frontline healthcare workers for our education workers who work directly with those special-needs students, many of whom cannot wear a mask. We are asking that the province develop a plan for contact tracing and that addressing the poor ventilation in schools be made a priority, rather paying lip service to the issue. And where education workers are working in conditions that place them at a higher risk of COVID infection, we are calling for them to be included among those who are first vaccinated.
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> The government's actions once again betray the fact that it lacks a plan to make schools safe and remains steadfastly unwilling to take action based on the lived concerns of the workers who care for vulnerable students in our education system.
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> Ignoring these concerns can only deepen and prolong the COVID crisis and will not achieve the relief that the government is seeking.

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