



January 3, 2022

Board of Trustees  
Durham District School Board  
400 Taunton Rd East  
Whitby, ON L1R 2K6  
sent via Email

Good afternoon Trustees,

We hope that everyone had a restful holiday season. It is fair to say that the new year has not started in the way that we had all hoped. As we face a transition, once again, to online learning, we are writing to urge you to take the next two weeks to do everything possible to keep students and staff safe before we return to schools in-person.

We applaud the decision by the government to provide improved masks for staff and students and would expect those to be available prior to any return to school. HEPA filters for every class have not been provided, and we encourage you to do what is necessary to ensure that occurs. We ask that you, as one of the largest employers in the region, request vaccination clinics for staff and students from Durham Region Health. Prioritizing boosters for staff, and first and second doses for eligible students will curb the spread of the virus in our school system. We understand that access to PCR tests and even Rapid Antigen tests has been stretched thin, however we feel the School Board still has a duty to report probable cases in our schools to the public, and to our members. We ask that a process for such reporting be created in the next two weeks. We also ask that the DDSB procure Rapid Antigen tests to be provided to staff and students upon their return, even if they are not provided by the Ministry.

Lastly, we are asking once again that you implement mandatory masking for all Kindergarten students. When the decision was originally made in August of 2020 to exclude Kindergarten students from the DDSB's masking mandate, little was known regarding the spread of COVID-19. It is now widely acknowledged to be airborne and that wearing masks is a vital layer of protection when attempting to curb transmission.

While there are many Kindergarten classrooms where most or all students wear masks, there are several where many students do not. This is untenable. Students and staff in those classrooms are put at significant risk, especially given the transmissibility of the Omicron variant, and the ineligibility of junior kindergarten students to be vaccinated.

Several school boards across the province have made the decision to mandate masks in Kindergarten, and we are asking you to take the necessary steps to do the same, prior to any return to school in two weeks.

The next Board Meeting is January 17<sup>th</sup>, the date when we are scheduled to return to in-person learning, and we do not feel that these decisions can be delayed until then. We urge you to be proactive and to put in place all measures possible that ensure that a return to school is safe and sustainable for all students and staff.

Kind regards,

Mary Fowler, President, ETFO Durham Teacher Local

Rayna Barrese, President, ETFO Durham DECE Local

George Taylor, President, ETFO Durham Occasional Teacher Local

Dennis Gibb, President, President, CUPE 218

Cc Norah Marsh, DDSB Director of Education