

Ministry of Education

Minister

315 Front Street West
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Ministère de l'Éducation

Ministre

315, rue Front Ouest
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Dear Ontario parents,

I am writing to you in unprecedented times.

The foremost priority of the government is to keep all Ontarians safe, including our students and educators. Working with our partners and all levels of government, we will do whatever it takes to deliver on this imperative.

Since we first learned of COVID-19, Ontario has been diligently monitoring the developing situation to protect the health and well-being of all Ontarians. We have also taken decisive action to ensure the province is positioned to be ready for any scenario.

That is why on March 12, 2020, based on the advice of Dr. David Williams, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, I issued a Ministerial Order to close all publicly-funded schools in the province until April 6, 2020. Our government took decisive action — one of the first jurisdictions in the industrialized world to have closed schools — with the aim of preventing the spread of COVID-19.

We are also the first province in Canada to declare a state of emergency. This declaration under Ontario's ***Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act*** enhances the province's ability to support our heroic frontline workers as they continue to confront this challenge fully.

While this period is marked by uncertainty, I hope that this letter can, in some part, provide answers to some of the questions I know many parents have.

Although this virus has been characterized and spoken about largely in terms of physical impacts, I believe we need to acknowledge and respond to the sense of fear and concern that your children may be feeling, especially for our younger learners. We have heard from many of them and their parents directly that these reactions come from a place of uncertainty and heightened media exposure that leads to more questions than answers.

During this time, I encourage you to continue to have open conversations with your children about COVID-19 and acknowledge that their reactions to this period — however emotional — are understandable and normal. There are many resources available to you and your children, notably [Kids Help Phone](#), which is Canada's only 24/7 national support service. They offer professional counselling, information and referrals and volunteer-led, text-based support to young people in both English and French. Please visit their website: www.kidshelpphone.ca, call: 1-800-668-6868, or text CONNECT to 686868.

While the health and safety of your children is my priority, I also know many of you are wondering how we will ensure students continue their journey of learning while out of the classroom.

As a first step to ensure the continued learning of your children, our government has launched an online portal dedicated to curating and providing access to a wide variety of educational resources, for all students from Kindergarten through to Grade 12.

This online portal, which is available at [Ontario.ca/learnathome](https://ontario.ca/learnathome), enables students at every grade level to continue learning while away from school. These resources are developed by Ontario educators, and resources for all grades are informed by leading instructional guidance. For those students who are in secondary school, we are providing access to online courses directly based on Ontario curricula.

Although publicly funded schools are ordered closed until April 6, the fluidity of developments around COVID-19 means we are preparing in the event the closure period is further extended.

Specifically, we are working to ensure that students will be able to continue their coursework and credit accumulation, even when we aren't able to be in a classroom setting. Ontario is a leading jurisdiction in the availability and richness of online courses, so we will be continuing to leverage these tools and other resources to promote students' learning and development. We are working with school boards to ensure students that currently do not have access to computers gain the technology needed to participate.

We know for those with children in a graduating year, there may be uncertainty about whether these students will be able to graduate. We want to make this clear: no graduating student will have their ability to graduate impacted by the two-week closure and the COVID-19 developments. For example, I have cancelled EQAO assessments for this school year. I have also approved a change in graduation requirements so the completion of the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) is not a barrier for students on track to graduate. We are also working with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities and the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development to ensure students can apply to post-secondary education (including Apprenticeship, College and University), regardless of the situation this semester.

In this time, it is more important than ever that we take every precaution to ensure that, when students return to class, they return to a safe and healthy learning environment.

The Ministry of Education is providing all school boards with access to funding for the deep cleaning of school facilities, childcare centres, and school buses. Following the closure period, we will minimize any risks to students, learners and our educators.

And for those of you who are returning from travel outside of Canada, it is critical that you follow the strong recommendations of Dr. Williams, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health

and self-isolate for 14 days when you and your family return. This means staying at home and avoiding contact with other people to help prevent the spread of disease to members of your family who may not have travelled with you or to your community.

If you think you or a family member have coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms or have been in close contact with someone who has it, in addition to self-isolation, please take the self-assessment test on ontario.ca/coronavirus to help determine how to seek further care. This site will also provide you with all the information you need to keep you and your family healthy and safe.

The Government of Ontario is committed to ensuring all Ontarians remain safe and secure during the challenging time. As the Minister of Education, I assure you I will make decisions based on scientific facts, the best advice of public health professionals, and always with the health and safety of your child at the top of mind.

While our work continues, we will continue to keep you informed along the way.

Stay safe.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Lecce', written in a cursive style.

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education