



Wednesday, February 16, 2022

Toronto District School Board
5050 Yonge Street
North York, ON
M2N 5N8

Open Letter

To: Colleen Russell-Rawlins, Director of Education

CC:

Karen Brown, President, ETFO Provincial

Derek Hulse, Staff Officer, ETFO Provincial

Andrew Gold, Associate Director

Michelle Lawrence, Senior Manager, TDSB Elementary Teaching Office

Maria Campbell, Centrally Assigned Principal, TDSB Elementary Teaching Office

Sam Venneri, Officer for Occasional Teaching, TDSB

RE: TDSB Elementary Occasional Teachers and Safe Working Conditions

We, the ETFO-Toronto Occasional Teachers' Local Executive are writing to strongly advocate on behalf of all of our members.

Please appreciate that our members move from school to school on a regular basis. Additionally, OTs may move from class to class interacting with several hundred students each day. Consequently, daily OTs are being exposed to many different school communities throughout the TDSB with a potential of hundreds of students and staff contacts every week. The reality is that an OT's rate of exposure is exponentially greater than a TDSB staff member who works at one site.

With little to no disclosure regarding Covid-19 cases in TDSB elementary schools, going to work jeopardizes our members' health and safety. This limited disclosure is deeply concerning and should also concern our employer. Like all Ontarians, we have a right to a safe workplace as per the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

Will our members be informed prior to accepting a job when students and staff are absent due to Covid-19? We ask you to consider this lack of disclosure. We ask you to consider the OT's perspective upon reporting to school in the morning only to learn that many staff and students are absent due to illness.

As essential workers who play an integral part in the TDSB education system. We understand that unfilled jobs resulting from an unsafe work environment are a source of concern to all system stakeholders, but the unfilled jobs will continue without safe working conditions.

Therefore, we urge you to consider the following recommendations to ensure a safe working environment for our members.

Recommendations:

1. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Ensure adequate supply of PPE including medical grade N95 masks in small, medium and large for best fit be made available each day to OTs. Provide training video and information on proper use of the N95 for staff.
- Enforce PPE protocols across schools including appropriate student and administrative use of masks (e.g., masks worn on chins considered non-compliance).
- School Administration will provide to our members upon their arrival at school for an assignment, a list of students who are accommodated and exempted from wearing a mask.

2. Accommodation

- Provide accommodations for our members who have high risk vulnerability (e.g., Virtual at Home (VH) supply work, Virtual within a School (VS) supply work, and exemption from lunchroom supervision duty, offer our members the option of outdoor lunch duty to limit exposure to unmasked students).

3. Testing

- Support the provision of Rapid Antigen Tests every week for all staff and students including daily OTs.
- Provide a free PCR test to all staff and students returning from a covid positive absence prior to returning to work.
- Ensure a negative PCR test is provided before return to school.

4. Notification of Covid-19

- Lobby the Ministry of Education for reinstatement, and any resources required for the reinstatement, of daily reporting of Covid-19 testing results in schools.
- Determine a method for recording and reporting Covid-19 cases by school should the Ministry fail to reinstate daily reporting.
- Relaunch the TDSB Covid-19 advisory website to inform all staff, students and parents of risks in various schools and Board worksites.

5. Lunchroom

- Ensure Hepa filters are always functioning including during indoor lunch.
- Ensure staff have masks and shields for indoor lunchroom duty.
- Ensure a strict no-talking policy during lunch when masks are off to reduce aerosolization.
- Stagger lunch times in all schools.

6. Classroom and Class Size

- Reduce class size to accommodate appropriate physical distancing and to meet current public health recommendations.
- Ensure that Hepa filters are in every classroom, and that they are appropriately maintained and functioning during class time regardless of noise level.

7. Sick Days

- Provide paid sick days for all our members forced to quarantine due to Covid exposure or a positive Covid test.

8. SmartFind

- Modify SmartFind to match OTs to appropriate assignments by designating teaching assignments as In-person (I), Virtual at home (VH), Virtual at school (VS), or Hybrid (H).
- Modify SmartFind so that OTs may indicate appropriate assignment preferences in up to 4 of the above categories. (To ensure appropriate assignment preparedness and possession of appropriate technological skills for assignment).

We welcome immediate and appropriate action that will directly improve the working conditions for thousands of TDSB Elementary Occasional Teachers.

Thank you for your time and consideration on behalf of frontline essential workers.

Regards,

ETFO Toronto Occasional Teachers' Local Executive