



Preparing for a New School Year

Next week, over two million students, 140,000 teachers and support staff and almost 8,000 principals and vice-principals will be back in school in Ontario. For the past two and a half years, students have moved from in-person to emergency remote to online to hybrid learning due to the pandemic. The constantly shifting learning experience created significant challenges both in terms of well-being and learning. Our education system needs to readjust, re-align, restructure and renew for the sake of students, fostering inclusive and anti-oppressive environments. We need to connect with those students who are not working at their expected grade level/potential, and identify those who continue to struggle mentally and socially.

The Ontario Principals' Council, representing 5,300 principals and vice-principals in the province's public elementary and secondary schools, calls on the government to immediately implement several recommendations to ensure all students have an opportunity to be successful, assess health concerns, address staff burnout and re-engage all learners.

To accomplish this, the government needs to

- call a Royal Commission on Education, with a particular focus on Post-Pandemic Learning and wellness in anti-oppressive and anti-colonial environments
- address ongoing staff shortages in all employee groups
- provide additional staff resources to schools such as Education Assistants, Early Childhood Educators, Child and Youth Workers and Child Development Counsellors
- repeal the mandatory requirement of two online courses to graduate
- engage more broadly with the education sector regarding the possible downloading of medical responsibilities to educators and education workers (PPM 81 review)
- pause provincial standardized testing for two years
- eliminate unnecessary bureaucratic tasks so principals and vice-principals can focus on student achievement, equity and well-being.

As we prepare for the “next normal” – in our schools and in our communities – education must be a top priority. The future of our children, our society, our economy and our financial recovery is at stake. We look forward to working with parents, educators, stakeholder groups and the government to ensure our system is meeting the learning needs of every student, while addressing the mental health needs of students and staff.

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