

## THE LINDSAY ADVOCATE

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## TLDSB caught in middle of school closure rumours

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Many Kawartha Lakes parents were greeted today by their children arriving home from school for the Christmas holidays with all the school supplies and technology they

will need to transition to distance learning effective Jan. 4.

Minister of Education Stephen Lecce

informed directors of education via memo on Tuesday that while a final decision on school closures hasn't been finalized, the province wants all students to have the tools on hand at home to make the transition to distance learning if necessary.

Local board spokesperson Sinead Fegan shared the following when contacted for comment by the *Advocate*, "At this time no decision has been made by the Ministry of Education. When we learn more from the province, we will inform the media and parents and guardians."

When pressed on the issue Fegan said, "As of right now students will return to school on Jan. 4. The decision of any extension or closure will be made by the Ministry of Education. We will inform parents/guardians directly through school Messenger," the automated system used by TLDSB to communicate directly with parents.

Local teachers have said on social media that they have been instructed by principals to ensure that all students have what they need to transition to on-line learning including sending home Google Chromebooks with every student where available.

"I don't think the ministry would be making these preparations unless they were serious about a shutdown," one teacher posted, "and it was so sad to be sending those computers home to kids who have limited or non-existent access to the

internet."

Premier Doug Ford and Education Minister Stephen Lecce are being pulled in multiple directions regarding any form of provincial shutdown during or after the Christmas holidays.

At a regularly scheduled press conference Dec. 17, Ontario's chief medical officer of health, Dr. David Williams, stressed that the province's COVID-19 situation is "trending in the wrong direction. We're trying to give all of the information they (the province) need...to make decisions."

Dr. Williams could not confirm whether the province has made a final decision about closing schools, however he did say, "I would be leery to have them open up in the midst of a rapid sweep up in cases in the community."

The Ontario Hospital Association further ratcheted up pressure on the premier by going public with a demand on Thursday to "implement a four-week lockdown in every public health unit with a COVID-19 infection rate of 40 cases per 1000,000 population or higher."

Currently York, Windsor-Essex, Toronto and Peel meet this threshold, but informed observers believe the hospital association is readying themselves and the provincial government for a significant increase in positive COVID cases right across the province in the new year after Christmas visitation rules are ignored by many Ontarians, and their public statement as

much as said so.

“The situation is extremely serious,” the press release stated. “We are now in the holiday season and if members of the public choose to ignore public health measures and gather outside their households, the consequences risk overwhelming Ontario hospitals.”

For context, the Haliburton Kawartha Pine

Ridge Health Unit reports a four per 100,000 infection rate as of Dec. 18, which pales in comparison to the Peel Health Unit that reported a 199.1 per 100,000 infection rate on the same date.

Ford and Lecce are expected to make a statement about potential school closures at their regularly scheduled press conference next week.

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