



NEWS

Health units urged to delay elementary students' Jan. 11 return to school

Elementary teachers' union says sending students, teachers and education workers back to school while the province is locked for another two to three weeks doesn't make sense

By [Catherine Whitnall](#) Kawartha Lakes This Week
Wednesday, January 6, 2021

Ontario's elementary teachers' union is calling on health units to do what the provincial government has not; prioritize community health and safety over politics and not have students return to in-class learning on Monday (Jan. 11).

"Educators know that in-person learning provides the most effective and equitable learning environment, but unfortunately we are at the height of this pandemic. It makes no sense for the government to send students, teachers and education workers back to school while the province is locked for another two to three weeks," stated Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario president Sam Hammond. "Despite repeated calls for adequate safety measures, the government has refused to implement them in a misguided effort to save money, jeopardizing

the health and safety of students, educators and their families.”

Hammond is asking public health units to use their authority to reconsider the decision to resume in-person learning for all elementary students, particularly in communities where the rate of community transmission is high, and to implement asymptomatic surveillance testing in schools to ensure a better understanding of the role that schools play in the spread of the virus and base future decisions on sound data.

Like other Kawartha Lakes area school boards, Trillium Lakelands director of education Wesley Hahn has been working with multiple health units and dealing with schools in districts with varying differences in case numbers. On Dec. 26 the board reported its second case of COVID-19 at Spruce Glen Public School in Huntsville. Both instances, roughly three months apart, were linked to community transmission.

While having to transition to total online learning has been a challenge, Hahn said doing so makes sense especially when it comes to safeguarding space in hospitals. He is confident that, should continuing to do so longer be necessary, the board is in “a very good position.”

Headlines newsletter

Top stories delivered to your inbox.

[Sign Up](#)

Galen Eagle, communications manager with the Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Catholic District School Board where there have been about 20 cases reported, all in the Clarington area, said the board has worked diligently to put safety measures in place. He noted, should the return of elementary students be delayed, the board will continue to work with parents and students.

Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board chair Diane Lloyd concurs.

“Our staff are very creative and resilient. We’re in a pretty good position right now and if we have to keep going, we will.”

Catherine Whitnall is a reporter with MyKawartha. She can be reached at cwhitnall@mykawartha.com. Follow her on [Twitter](#) and MyKawartha on [Facebook](#)

Tags: [Hyper Local](#), [Human Interest](#), [News](#)