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## Questions remain as to who will administer rapid COVID-19 testing in schools

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At a recent press conference Education Minister Stephen Lecce and Chief Medical Officer of Health David Williams were vague on key educational issues, leaving Trillium Lakelands District School Board parents, students and staff needing more clarification about March Break.

This includes questions on who will be administering the rapid COVID-19 test in

the school setting, and when Muskoka students be back to in-person learning.

During the question and answer section of the briefing, March Break, scheduled to run from March 13-22, became a point of contention. Dr. Williams was asked directly if there were plans to “cancel March Break to make up for time lost due to COVID-19.”

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Rather than confirming that the holiday will go forward as planned, Williams replied, “Sufficient notice will be given (regarding March Break).”

Sinead Fegan, communications officer for TLDSB was equally non-committal about the holiday moving forward replying to an *Advocate* e-mail, “The decision regarding March Break will be made by the government. We will communicate all information to parents/guardians when we know more.”

Colin Matthew, president of OSSTF District 15 who represents all high school teachers in TLDSB, stated, “The discussion over March Break is a distraction. There has been no disruption to the work our members are doing or in the expectations of students.”

When Dr. Williams was asked about what statistical evidence needs to be in place to allow all schools to re-open in provincial hot spots like Simcoe-Muskoka, Williams talked about the plan that would need to be in place prepared by the local board of health. He also touted the new rapid testing kits available to TLDSB and other school boards that will not only allow for upwards of 25,000 tests a day to be done and that

these tests “can be administered by non-medical personnel.”

An inquiry to the ministry regarding who might be administering those tests went unanswered. When TLDSB was asked by the *Advocate* if this new technology could open the door to school board personnel being asked to administer the test Fegan responded, “This (will be) a decision made and released by the government.”

Matthew shared, “Our collective agreement precludes our members doing medical procedures. We are educators, not paramedicals. This would be in no one’s best interest.”

Lecce made it very clear in the briefing “that we want all students back at school and the Council of Medical Officers of Health support this.”

Williams added, “Rates are coming down and this may allow schools to reopen but we are looking for COVID variants also. We are watching, hoping and not ignoring the threats that exist.”

Lecce and Williams have promised another press conference before Feb. 10 when the provincial lockdown is to be potentially lifted.

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