

However, the minister of education, Stephen Lecce, has decided to frame the March Break question as a public health question rather than an educational question and it looks like the public health community is rallying behind him.

“My decision point is going to be made exclusively on medical advice. If (doctors) believe that cancelling the break will disincentive travel and is in the best interest of public health, I’m going to follow that advice full stop,” Lecce told a press conference in Ottawa on Feb. 4.

Lecce says the government will follow the advice on March Break from Ontario’s chief medical officer of health, Dr. David Williams. “We’ll get the final opinion from the CMO, I suspect in the coming days.”

Opinions are starting to trickle out from medical officers of health around the province and things don’t look good for a break occurring as planned running from March 15-19.

Locally, HKPR acting medical officer of health Ian Gemmill favours something short of a complete cancellation of March Break. “I would support a deferral of March Break. It reinforces the message to the public not to travel.”

Although the federal government’s international travel restrictions and disincentives make getaways to warm holiday destinations highly impractical, a deferral of March Break will also reduce the likelihood of domestic travel. It is better to delay March Break until there is warmer weather and the coronavirus decreases naturally, meaning there is there is less likelihood of it circulating.”

Last week, Eastern Ontario region medical officer of health Dr. Paul Roumeliotis

suggested March break should be cancelled for all students to keep COVID-19 case counts down in the community.

“I think if kids stay in school it’s not going to be a problem,” said Roumeliotis. “Unless kids stay home and parents keep them home during spring break and don’t mix with others then that’s not going to be a problem but what we saw during Christmas break was really the opposite. The numbers really went up four-fold in terms of positivity for the age group between 11 and 13 for example.”

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 the work our members are doing nor in the expectations of students. While distance learning remains a poor substitute for face to face, for many of our students cancelling an anticipated break would be a dismissal of the significant work our members have done supporting students through this.”

Leaders of the two largest teacher federations in Ontario have gone on record publicly opposing any change to the planned break.

OSSTF president Harvey Bischof, in a televised interview on Feb. 4, went even further than Matthew and said educators, students and parents need the break.

“Bearing in mind the pressures under which everybody in education have been under, cancelling March break does seem like a bad idea,” said Bischof.

The Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario is also calling on the Ontario government to give students and staff the week off.