

MINISTER OF EDUCATION ON WHEN TO SHUT DOWN SCHOOLS

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When schools across Ontario were shut down back in March there were, as far as we knew, no cases of COVID-19 in the classroom.

Today, according to numbers from the Ministry of Health, roughly 13 per cent of the province's schools have reported at least one confirmed case, but the education system continues to operate, albeit with a number of precautions.

Stephen Lecce, the Ontario minister of education,



Roland Cilliers/Torstar
Minister of Education Stephen Lecce came to Oakville on Nov. 12 and briefly talked about what it would take for a full shutdown of schools.

was in Halton on Nov. 12 and was asked what the threshold was for a full closure of schools similar to what we experienced earlier in the year.

"For us right now, the overwhelming priority of government and public health is to keep schools open, because that's a social priority of the government. In our civil society, we need kids to be learning for their mental health, their development ... Public

Health will provide any direction if we need to change course," said Lecce.

The minister credited the improvements, the resolve of staff and health and safety changes for keeping school infection numbers where they currently are.

As of Nov. 13, there have been 3,282 school-related cases of COVID-19 in the province. In neighbouring Quebec, infections among students and staff have reached over 10,000.

"When you compare to Quebec, for example, we have almost twice the amount of students and 30 per cent more schools and yet ... I believe Quebec has 100 per cent more COVID. So it's a problem and it's a problem for all of us. Public health is providing guidance, and we are following it every step of the way and if they provide recommendation to change course, we will adopt it. But to date, they're suggesting the protocols are working," said Lecce.

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