



Delay in return to school for students

Due to the rapid surge in COVID-19 cases over the holiday break, return to school for most students will be delayed until at least January 10, 2022. This delay, ordered by the Public Health Officer today, will allow for enhanced safety measures to be planned and put in place to help contain the spread of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 through the K-12 education system.

School staff will be returning to work as planned on January 3 & 4 to help prepare for the return of students and implementing the enhanced precautions. Some support staff will be needed to provide supports for students during the delayed full return to school. Wages will continue for all staff during this delayed return to classes. CUPE is advocating for wage continuity for all K-12 support staff in the case of any other school closures.

CUPE has been meeting regularly with the Ministry of Education and other K-12 system stakeholders over the holiday break and has offered several priority recommendations to protect school district staff, students, and communities. These recommendations include:

- **Rapid tests** should be made widely available to staff, students, and their families at no cost.
- **K-12 staff should be prioritized for booster shots** to ensure maximum possible immunity levels in the K-12 sector.
- **Respirator-style masks – ideally N95s** – should be provided to staff and students. CUPE also supports increasing education efforts on the importance of wearing masks, and the proper use of well-fitted, high quality, Canadian manufactured respirator-style masks.

- **Daytime custodial services** be utilized for twice daily cleaning of frequently touched surfaces, including at least once during school hours.
- **Support for improved ventilation** in school district buildings. In situations where mechanical HVAC or open windows are not feasible (particularly in winter), portable HEPA filters in classrooms and other school spaces to ensure maximum air filtration.

CUPE believes these precautions are necessary to keep our schools clean and healthy. If implemented they will help keep all learning environments open and accessible, while offering the highest protections for students and staff.

K-12 support staff do vital work with students, many of whom have unique needs that require face-to-face interaction. Others work closely with vulnerable students that require special supports that can't be provided online. Much of the work done by school support staff must be done in close contact. It is extremely important that we take all necessary safety measures to keep learning environments open and accessible for students, families, and communities.

The COVID-19 Omicron variant has made this already stressful pandemic even more challenging. This public health crisis continues to evolve at a very quick pace. CUPE and the K-12 President Council Executive remains in close contact with the Ministry of Education as the situation unfolds and return to schools are developed and implemented.