



Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers
L'Association provinciale des enseignantes et enseignants du Québec

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Montreal, January 11, 2022

Dear Sirs,

We are writing to you today, on behalf of the 8,000 members we represent, to inform you of some persistent concerns in connection with the return to in-person classes on January 17 next, and with the measures implemented to protect the health and ensure the safety of teachers, school staff members, students and families. These concerns have been exacerbated by the prevailing context caused by the rapid spread of Omicron in the community and the dramatic spike in COVID-19 case numbers in recent weeks.

As we are all aware, the arrival of the new variant has taken everyone by surprise, and the fact that it is much more contagious than previous variants has created a level of challenge for societies everywhere that is unprecedented in this pandemic. However, the press conference of January 6, instead of reassuring teachers, left us with more questions than answers, and served to highlight the lack of real progress with regard to

ventilation and air quality in schools, both of which are key factors in the transmission of the virus. Even before the arrival of Omicron, we witnessed a significant increase in the number of COVID-19 cases in schools, especially after the cold weather began. In our opinion, given what happened last year, this was entirely predictable. While QPAT believes, as you do, that in-person education must continue to be a priority, for the sake of student well-being as well as academic success, we nevertheless think that in-person classes should not resume unless the best possible conditions are put in place to protect the health and safety of school staff members, students and their families. Accordingly, QPAT believes, in the present context, that additional measures must be implemented in order to minimize the transmission of COVID-19 in Québec's school.

Given that:

- According to recent research, the Omicron variant of COVID-19 is three to four times more transmissible than the Delta variant.
- Although double vaccination appears to protect most infected people from more serious disease, it also appears to be much less effective at preventing Omicron infection.
- Unlike previous variants, Omicron appears to be just as transmissible among children as among adults.
- The scientific community still believes that aerosols (micro-particles) are the main form of transmission of COVID-19.
- So far, few real steps have been taken to improve air quality in schools, despite recurrent requests by the education community and multiple recommendations by specialists. Although deliveries of CO2 detectors to some schools have been announced, these detectors, when installed, will only measure air quality in classrooms and will do nothing to improve it.
- Ontario has invested more than \$600 million to provide stand-alone high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter units in every occupied classroom as well as in gymnasiums, libraries and other learning spaces not already equipped with mechanical ventilation, to add to the arsenal of measures designed to minimize COVID-19 transmission in schools.
- Although the Québec government has said school service centres and school boards can request air exchangers, in reality very few of these units have as yet been installed in schools, at a time when we need them the most.

QPAT asks the Québec government to implement the following measures, in addition to those already announced, in order to limit COVID-19 transmission in schools and hence ensure the safety of school staff members, students and families:

- Make N95 masks available to all teachers and school staff members who come into contact with students, and especially to preschool and vocational training teachers, and teachers working with special needs students.
- Install ventilation and air filtering devices as quickly as possible in poorly ventilated classrooms, as identified by the schools themselves.
- Provide rapid screening tests for all school staff members.
- Avoid a return to in-person teaching in schools until the epidemiological situation has stabilized and the necessary measures have been put in place.
- Carry out a proper consultation of all partners in the education community, including the unions, before making decisions on these issues.



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President
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