

Sunday, December 6, 2020

Doctor Lawrence Loh
Medical Officer of Health, Region of Peel
7120 Hurontario Street
Mississauga, ON
L5W 1N4

Via email

Hello Dr. Loh,

I am emailing to share my concerns related to the spread of COVID-19 in our Peel schools.

As President of the Peel Elementary Teachers' local, I serve 6,900 elementary teachers in the Peel District School Board. I am deeply concerned for the safety of my members, staff, and students in our schools.

Daily we are made aware of cases that occur in our schools and, most recently, the outbreak at Fairview PS. I'm concerned that not all teachers who have contact with classes where there is a case have been told to self-isolate or been advised to get tested. This has been a concern in many of our schools. On Thursday, I learned that a class and a teacher were told to self-isolate and get tested at Sir William Gage. This is a French Immersion (FI) class. FI classes have a French teacher and an English teacher. Each teacher has their own classroom of students. Each teacher teaches both classes. They either teach French or English to one class in the morning and French/English to the other class in the afternoon – or they teach one class all day and the other class the next day. As you can see, both teachers interact with both classes for the same amount of time. This is why it was very surprising that only the French teacher (who is the homeroom teacher of the infected student) was directed to self-isolate and get tested, but the English teacher was not given this direction. How is this safe for the English teacher and their family, as well as for the homeroom class the English teacher teaches? How is this safe for the English class that was taught by the French teacher? Please explain how this decision was made.

Yesterday, the Peel District School Board communicated a new screening process for students. Students are to remain home if they have one COVID symptom and it is recommended that they get tested, even if it is a minor symptom. Is this recommendation being made to staff at the PDSB as well? If not, please explain why not.

Do we really expect parents to keep their children home for a minor symptom when they don't have paid leaves? Parents aren't keeping their children home when they have significant symptoms. Daily, parents are being called into schools to pick up children who have come to school with fevers and other symptoms. How will this change in the screening process be enforced?

Lastly, Dr. Loh, I would like you to address the release of information. When there is a case in a school, all staff are sent a letter informing them of the case in their school. The school is not told which class has the case. The lack of sharing of this information needs to change. Every staff member should be informed which classroom has the infected case so staff members can know if they have had contact with the infected class. Contact tracing is not being accurately done in our schools. Staff members are concerned that they are not being directed to self-isolate and get tested when they have had contact with infected students. Please let me know how this concern will be addressed.

Dr. Loh, we are counting on Peel Public Health to make decisions to keep us safe and not make decisions based on the desire of the Premier and the Minister of Education to keep all schools open until the winter break. I have copied our Mayors to assist with putting pressure on the government to make decisions that protect your constituents. Clearly our schools are transmitting this virus. Please review the practices in our schools. I am requesting that you send officials in to do random checks. Dr. Loh and Mayor Crombie received information about parents not wearing masks on school property. Who is enforcing the current rules and regulations set out by Peel Public Health and ensuring the rules are followed at our schools? Peel is in a lock down. What have we done to enforce the lock down in our schools?

Thanks for reading my email. I look forward to hearing back from all of you on the actions that will be taken to address the concerns that have been outlined. I serve, and you serve, frontline workers who are working with our children. They are risking their safety and the safety of their families to educate our children. As frontline workers, they must be protected and know that you are working to keep them safe.

In health,

Gail Bannister-Clarke
President

cc: Bonnie Crombie, Mayor of Mississauga
Patrick Brown, Mayor of Brampton
Allan Thompson, Mayor of Caledon