



**Marit Stiles**  
MPP / Députée, Davenport

**Queen's Park**  
Room 157, Main Legislative Building /  
Pièce 157, Édifice de l'Assemblée législative  
Queen's Park • Toronto, ON M7A 1A5  
☎ 416-326-7202  
✉ mstiles-qp@ndp.on.ca

**Community Office**  
**Bureau du circonscription**  
1199 Bloor Street West  
Toronto, ON M6H 1N4  
☎ 416-535-3158  
✉ mstiles-co@ndp.on.ca

Dr. Joshua Tepper  
Education Health Advisor to the Minister of Education  
5th Flr, 438 University Ave,  
Toronto, ON  
M7A 2A5

November 30, 2020

Dr. Tepper,

I write to you today on behalf of the Official Opposition to congratulate you on your new role as the province's Education Health Advisor. In the spirit of transparency, I'd like to invite you to a meeting to discuss concerns brought forward by Ontario families, school staff, and experts regarding COVID-19's impact on our education system.

I want to be clear: I believe that Ontario lacks a comprehensive provincial plan for students, families, and education workers that is proactive rather than reactive; that addresses existing inequities and challenges made worse by the pandemic; and that is expert-driven, based on the latest scientific information.

While we are hopeful that new vaccines could help reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the future, we know that a provincial schools plan cannot solely rely the roll out of these vaccines because they are currently not approved for children.

I am grateful for experts like yourself who are stepping in provide expertise and support based on feedback from families, frontline education workers and school staff, and fellow experts.

Here are four areas of concern:

**1) Developing a provincial school surveillance program**

Prior to the start of the school year, the Official Opposition inquired about a provincial school surveillance program for early detection of COVID cases. To date, there is no plan in place.

Since September, Ontario has seen an ongoing increase of school-related cases. To no one's surprise, the rise of school-related cases and school outbreaks often occur in communities with the highest rates of infection, like northwest Toronto and Brampton. It's no coincidence that COVID-19 disproportionately affects students and communities already set back by systemic racism and inequities.

Can you please share what the province's plans are to develop a school surveillance program that identifies and supports schools in communities with high rates of transmission before more students, families, and school staff get sick?

**2) Prevent "super spreader" events after holiday break**

Many families and experts are worried that there could be an overall significant increase of COVID transmission within schools following the holiday break. The fact that many boards have not been able to reduce class sizes to the recommended 15 students with the funding allotted thus far, increases this risk. This is especially concerning

given that families and education staff are already reporting difficulty with accessing tests and supports if they are positive, like paid sick leave and safe places to isolate.

What provincial supports are in place to communicate public health measures across school communities prior to the holiday break? Can you provide insight on how prepared the province is to manage an increase in school-related cases and outbreaks in the new year?

### **3) Closing the pandemic learning gap**

Despite best efforts by parents and school staff, too many students living with disabilities or learning challenges are falling through the cracks. The pandemic has disrupted many learning plans and the current provincial approach is failing many of these students, particularly those who cannot physically attend school because the commute to school increases their chances of getting COVID (i.e., students who live in high rise buildings or take public transit) or because they are immunocompromised or live with someone who is immunocompromised.

We have asked the Minister to share the province's progress on proactively identifying and supporting students at high risk for learning losses, but can you please advise what plans are underway for the safe and orderly return to school for kids currently enrolled in virtual learning?

### **4) Science-based information**

Ontario's COVID-19 response must be driven by expert advice that is transparent and based on the latest scientific information. What measures are in place to ensure that the province's education plan incorporates important scientific updates like the risks of airborne transmission in school classrooms?

Dr. Tepper, I want to thank you for choosing to share your expertise with the government, and I hope that your contributions can help start to address the gaps in the plan that have become evident.

I look forward to meeting with you to further discuss these challenges and how we can marshal the resources needed to keep our schools open and our students and staff safe.

Sincerely,



**Marit Stiles**  
**MPP Davenport**  
**Official Opposition Critic for Education**

cc. Hon. Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education