

# Andrea Horwath



Leader of the Official Opposition  
Chef de l'Opposition officielle  
MPP / Députée, Hamilton Centre

## Queen's Park

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Dr. Kieran Moore  
Chief Medical Officer of Health  
Office of Chief Medical Officer of Health, Public Health  
21st Floor, 393 University Ave  
Toronto, ON M5G 2M2

**July 9, 2021**

Dear Dr. Moore,

Throughout this devastating pandemic, Ontarians have come to understand the importance of the role of Chief Medical Officer of Health, and of strong public health agencies, and we congratulate you again on your appointment to this critical role. We know that you bring a wealth of experience to help steer us through this crucial next phase of the pandemic response.

There is much to celebrate with vaccination rates climbing and a sense of hope returning, but there remains pronounced uncertainty, frustration and anxiety among parents, students, teachers and education workers.

As the Official Opposition, we have the privilege of speaking with families, educators, school board trustees and school leaders every day. This past year and a half has been exceptionally difficult for them all. Ontario's schools were closed to in-person learning longer than any other jurisdiction in the country, and the social, mental health and academic impacts have been widely reported. Too often, families and educators have felt left out of the discussion around school safety. This was, in part, responsible for gaps in the provincial response plan, resulting in unnecessary risks of exposure and painful, prolonged school closures.

Parents don't need any more evidence of the harms of further school disruption than the personality and behavioural changes they see in their own children. But a new report from the Hospital for Sick Children is unequivocal — half of children between eight and 12 in Ontario are showing clinically significant depressive symptoms, and that number rises to 70 per cent in teens. Equally troubling, they didn't bounce back between waves. It's going to take a lot of support, investment and love to get our kids back on track.

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We are writing today to ask you to publicly release the specific information and your public health recommendations on the following:

- What public health metrics will be used to determine the safe reopening of schools this fall
- What ventilation standard is required to make classrooms and schools safe, and prevent COVID spread (For example, New York City has announced that all 56,000 New York City public school classrooms will be equipped with two air purifiers by September. Are similar recommendations being considered here?)
- Your recommendations on masking, distancing, cohorting and safe class-sizes
- Your recommendations on the level of surveillance and asymptomatic testing that is required to make schools safe
- Your recommendations on minimum vaccination levels for safe reopening, and any specific programs being undertaken to ensure that measure is met

Last summer, families, school boards and education workers were left waiting until well into August before they heard any information about what to expect in September, and weren't given notice of changes. And at the height of the pandemic, we heard time and again that the voices of workers, and of students themselves, were not being heard.

Like many Ontarians, we expect the province to be undertaking considerable work now, during the summer months, to ensure that a safe return is guaranteed. But the details remain scant. We have heard nothing about hiring, ventilation upgrades or any other safety measures being prepared during this summer break. Your timely advice is critical to ensuring that this work can get underway so schools are safe for children to return to in September.

The Official Opposition believes that the best place for students is in the classroom, with the direct support of caring teachers and education workers. Thank you in advance for helping to make that happen.

We look forward to speaking with you further about this at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Andrea Horwath,  
Leader of the Official Opposition New Democrats  
MPP, Hamilton Centre

Marit Stiles,  
Official Opposition Critic for Education  
MPP, Davenport