

# Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee demands immediate end to all in-person learning

**Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee**  
**27 April 2021**

*This statement was discussed and adopted at the most recent meeting of the Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee held April 25. To learn more about the work of CERSC or to get involved, contact us at [cersb.csppb@gmail.com](mailto:cersb.csppb@gmail.com).*

Educators and school support staff organized in the Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee demand that all in-person learning be immediately halted across the country.

Under conditions of a rapid acceleration of a third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic—one moreover, that threatens to be the deadliest yet—this drastic step is necessary to prevent the needless death of thousands of workers, students and their relatives. It must be combined with the shutdown of all nonessential production and the payment of full wages to all affected workers and families, so they can shelter at home until the virus is suppressed and the population inoculated.

Ontario provides the starkest example of how dire the current situation is, and how unwilling and incapable the capitalist ruling elite is to combat the pandemic and protect lives. Ontario hospitals are already implementing triage; that is, denying care to certain COVID-19 patients based on their likelihood of survival. Discussions are taking place about holding lotteries to determine who will be given life-saving drugs. One scenario projects that the province will have more than five times the number of ICU patients by the end of May than the government's self-declared upper limit for maintaining adequate medical care. Last week's tragic death of Emily Viegas, a 13-year-old Brampton girl, from the virus underscores that the health disaster is impacting all age groups.

The third wave of the pandemic is the direct product of the ruling class' open economy/open schools policy. In Ontario, the Doug Ford-led Progressive Conservative government's reopening of all schools between mid-January and mid-February, after a brief decline in cases and as new strains of the virus were circulating, led to an explosion of infections

as had been predicted by numerous medical experts—including those on the government's own COVID-19 Science Advisory Table.

The principal vectors of the third wave, as health authorities in Toronto and the adjacent Peel Region concede, have been schools, warehouses, factories and other industrial workplaces. Yet the Ford government has adamantly refused to shut down all nonessential workplaces.

And if Ford and Education Minister Stephen Lecce ultimately announced that Ontario's schools would be returning to online learning when spring break ended on April 19, it was only because it was facing the double-threat of a collapse of the health care system and a mounting public outcry from rank-and-file educators, parents, local public health officers and other scientific experts.

Ontario's five education unions, however, had no part in this. Like their counterparts across the country, they have systematically suppressed all opposition among educators and parents to the open schools policy.

Ontario's inadequate and belated shift to online learning only goes to show that the political establishment has no interest in seriously combatting the pandemic. Nothing has been done to support families whose children must now learn remotely, whether by supplying them with up-to-date technology, or providing financial support so parents don't face the almost impossible task of juggling work commitments and childcare responsibilities. Nor has any additional support been provided to students, many of whom must struggle with social problems and mental health issues exacerbated by the ruling elite's policy of mass infections and death. Meanwhile, special education teachers and assistants are forced to continue in-person learning with totally inadequate personal protective equipment, and daycare centres continue to operate normally with no additional financial or personnel resources.

The sabotaging of remote learning is deliberate and is a continuation of the assault on education and public services

Ford launched on coming to power in June 2018. The Ford government intends to use the social and personal pressures it produces to press, as soon as it calculates it is politically feasible, for a return to in-class instruction behind a smokescreen of bogus concerns about the “wellbeing” and “mental health” of “our kids.” Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation President Harvey Bischof has all but begged the Ford government to do just that, stating in a recent press release, “We believe that students learn and receive supports and services best when they are in-person in school, something that the Minister of Education has echoed many times. It’s time that this government comes up with a clear plan based on evidence-informed medical advice to allow front-line education staff immediate access to vaccinations and keep schools open safely.”

Ford is no outlier. Spearheaded by the Trudeau Liberal government, which focused on funnelling hundreds of billions of dollars into the financial markets and banks to safeguard the wealth of the rich and super-rich before ordering the reopening of the economy and schools, every provincial government is complicit in prioritizing corporate profits over human lives.

Outside Ontario, almost all schools remain open despite a dramatic surge in infections and the spread of the new more contagious and lethal variants. The British Columbia New Democratic Party government has made clear it has no intention of stopping in-person learning, which is acting as one of the main vectors for the spread of the deadly P1 variant. ICUs across the province are filling up with younger, otherwise healthy patients. Amid this mounting calamity, BC NDP Premier John Horgan recently cynically sought to shift blame onto young workers forced by the government to continue labouring in unsafe conditions for spreading the disease, remarking callously, “Don’t blow this for the rest of us.”

If the open schools policy continues, the horrific reports now coming out of Ontario hospitals about the rationing of life-saving care will be replicated in a matter of weeks from coast to coast. That is the approach advocated by the Trudeau federal Liberal government and all its provincial counterparts. They have overseen a policy of open schools to free parents from childcare responsibilities so they can get back to work generating profits for the corporate elite. The corporatist trade unions have at every point supported and enforced this policy. They supported the reckless reopening of schools last September and again in January. They have ordered teachers to put their faith in totally inadequate government health and safety protocols that have turned classrooms into virus hotspots, driven up community infection rates, and helped overwhelm ICUs.

The CERSC fights for a worker-led alternative to the

ruling class’ policy of mass infection and death. We call for all in-person learning to be halted until the pandemic is brought under control, the closure of all nonessential production and businesses with full compensation paid to every worker, and the best possible protection to be provided to all workers who must continue on the job to maintain society’s basic needs. In collaboration with parents, teachers and education workers must create the best conditions for online learning, including by providing every student with a laptop computer, free internet access, and a comfortable learning environment in their home. Parents must be freed from all working obligations and paid full wages until the pandemic is over so they can stay at home with their kids. Billions must be invested in public education, which has been starved of funding by all political parties for decades.

The resources for all of these measures exist, but they are being hoarded by Canada’s super-rich and wealthy. The more than \$50 billion accumulated by Canada’s billionaires since the beginning of the pandemic, not to mention the hundreds of billions more in public funds given to the banks and rich investors, must be seized and used to fund social needs, not squandered on personal enrichment.

To fight for this program, the CERSC calls on educators and support staff in every school, college and university to form rank-and-file safety committees and contact us. We appeal to workers in every sector, families with young children, and students, to form workplace and neighbourhood committees to unify our struggles. Our goal must be the preparation of a political general strike to impose a strategy to combat the pandemic that places the health and very lives of the vast majority ahead of the obscene profiteering and self-enrichment of the wealthy few.

Our struggle in Canada must develop as part of an international counteroffensive by the working class to put a stop to the ruling class’ “profits before lives” policy and establish a science-based, globally coordinated response aimed at suppressing COVID-19 and saving lives. We therefore declare our support for the International Committee of the Fourth International’s call to establish the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees and urge all educators in Canada to attend the international online May Day rally this Saturday, which will discuss the program and perspective of the IWA-RFC.



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