

Canadian education workers speak out against reckless return to school after the abandonment of all COVID-19 public health measures

Our reporters
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Are you an education worker? We want to hear how you have experienced the return to school with no protective measures in place. Fill out the form at the end of this article or email cersc.csppb@gmail.com.

The start of the 2022/23 school year in Ontario has created immense anxiety among many education workers, who are correctly afraid of COVID-19 infection and are trying to do what they can to avoid it. This is the third school year of the pandemic, but the first without any public health measures, such as mask mandates, to protect students and staff from infection.

Prior to the start of the school year, Ontario's chief medical officer Kieran Moore, in preparation for what he cynically termed "respiratory season," undemocratically declared that all public health measures in schools would be abandoned and that COVID-19 would be treated like the flu. People no longer needed to isolate for at least five days if they have tested positive. They are encouraged to stay home for as long as their symptoms appear and after that are encouraged to wear a mask around people when symptoms subside, despite still being infectious with COVID-19. These decisions are totally unscientific, because at least 40-45 percent of positive cases are asymptomatic.

Air quality in schools remain as poor as it was prior to the pandemic. With COVID-19 protections now stripped and very few people wearing high-quality N95 masks, the virus has almost unlimited opportunities to infect students and staff in schools.

Dr. Tara Moriarty, who directs the Moriarty Lab's

research into infectious diseases at the University of Toronto, estimated that as of September 16 97,000 people are being infected with COVID-19 for the first time *every day* across Canada. This figure includes 48,000 people in Ontario, 16,000 in Quebec, and 11,000 in both Alberta and British Columbia. These are the most accurate statistics publicly available because all governments have consciously dismantled their pandemic reporting infrastructure.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has received comments from education workers across the country opposing these reckless policies, which are fully endorsed by the trade unions.

Aviva, a teacher from Ontario, wrote, "While it has genuinely been wonderful to see my students again and welcome them to my classroom, I am beyond disappointed and disgruntled at the lack of Covid infection controls in the school. The 'Urgency of Normal' propaganda has permeated every facet of school life, from the absence of masks on staff and students, to the absence of air filtration and proper ventilation in classrooms, and just recently, my board was directed to remove Covid as a reason for student absences on the online reporting tool. As one of a handful of staff who is still masking (and one of only two wearing an N95), I continue to feel further detached and isolated from my colleagues. The return has been quite bittersweet."

Mina from New Brunswick commented on school safety, "Schools are NOT opening safely, nationwide by the look of it. High quality masks (N95/KN95 or better) have proven to reduce transmission. COVID and

Monkeypox are airborne, but Monkeypox has also seen formite transmission, so hand washing and clearing surfaces is important.”

Carrie, an educator from Saskatchewan, wrote, “There are no COVID measures in Saskatchewan schools. The Saskatchewan Teachers Federation tells us they can’t do anything about COVID. Masking, ventilation, and air purifiers would help a bit. Serious messaging about COVID and caring for others would help as well.”

An education worker from the French school board in Toronto had the following exchange with our reporter:

Q: What are your thoughts on the return to classes?

A: I was excited until I became a lunch duty supervisor on top of everything else. Our school is short on lunch ladies. If you know anyone who is looking to take care of 27 kids for 1-hour yard duty and 1-hour lunch. Please let me know!

Q: Shouldn’t this job be performed by a worker paid a decent wage?

A: It’s awful. Not a good situation for anybody at the moment. Not sure how long I can do this. And alone with 27 children!

Q: Doesn’t this lunch duty cut into your own personal lunch break or prep time?

A: My personal lunch. No prep time. It’s awful.

In addition to returning to the classroom with no protections as the pandemic continues to rage, education workers in several provinces are engaged in contract battles for wage and benefit increases. In Ontario and British Columbia, contracts for hundreds of thousands of teachers, education assistants, caretakers, administrative staff and early childhood educators have expired. The unions are doing all they can to conspire with the hard-right Ford government in Ontario and the New Democratic Party government in British Columbia to ram through concessions-filled agreements, including below-inflation pay “increases,” and suppress all workers’ opposition.

Members of the Ontario Education Workers Rank-and-File Committee’s (OEWRFC) Facebook discussion group spoke about their views on the fight for wage increases and in defense of public education. Expressing just how much the unions are keeping workers in the dark about their behind-the-scenes talks with the Ford government, one worker wrote, “What contract negotiations? As usual nothing will get done.

First of all we should all go on strike all together all at once. The whole province and strike for as long as it takes! Right now I think the state of public education is a s**t show and Ford and [education minister] Lecce are liars. The unions are sleeping with them and unfortunately the general public has no clue what is going on in schools right now. They also have no idea how little support workers get for the work we do.”

“I’ve heard absolutely nothing about negotiations. The teacher’s unions have not started anything to my knowledge,” said another member. “I haven’t even heard a thank you to any Ed staff throughout Covid! This is truly disgusting.”

The Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee (CERSC) was established to fight for a program of the global elimination of COVID-19, which is the only way to prevent ongoing waves of mass infection and death, and the growth of debilitating cases of Long Covid.

Email cersc.csppb@gmail.com or follow the committee on Twitter to get involved or tell us about your own experience.



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