



# DSAO

DOWN  
SYNDROME  
ASSOCIATION  
OF ONTARIO

August 27, 2020

Minister of Education Stephen Lecce  
Ministry of Education  
315 Front Street West, 14<sup>th</sup> Floor  
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Re: Return to School for Students with Special Needs

The Down Syndrome Association of Ontario (DSAO) is a registered charity composed of 19 local Down syndrome associations from across the province. Together, we coordinate efforts to raise awareness, educate, and encourage the inclusion of people with Down syndrome and their families.

It is through this lens that we are observing the efforts to provide a safe return to school this September. With so many competing priorities and with limited resources being made available, we are writing to ensure that an equity- and rights-based approach is being taken when considering the accommodations required for the 300,000+ students with special needs in the Ontario school system.

We have three areas of concern to bring to your attention at this time, on behalf of the families we represent:

1. **Social Inclusion.** Many students with special needs are fully integrated into mainstream classrooms, with supports to ensure their success. What guidance is the government providing to school boards to ensure that physical distancing does not leave students with special needs isolated from their peers?
2. **Masks.** Some students with special needs are not able to tolerate wearing masks for the duration of the school day. Is the government providing guidance to school boards on how this should be handled? Will students who cannot wear masks be excluded from class activities?
3. **Online learning.** If moving to an online learning platform is necessary during a potential second wave of COVID-19, what guidance and funding is the government providing to school boards to ensure that students with special needs receive the extra supports they require to be successful in this setting? Has there been any consideration to allowing students with special needs to continue going to school to receive these needed supports, similar to BC last spring?

People with Down syndrome are people first and share the same human rights as every other citizen in Ontario. We ask the government to give consideration to the accommodations students with Down syndrome and other special needs will require in order to have equitable access to education, even during this pandemic.

Sincerely,

Domenic Gentilini  
Chair, Down Syndrome Association of Ontario