



## Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association

Box 2064, Suite 1804  
20 Eglinton Avenue West  
Toronto, Ontario M4R 1K8  
T. 416.932.9460 F. 416.932.9459  
[ocsta@ocsta.on.ca](mailto:ocsta@ocsta.on.ca) [www.ocsta.on.ca](http://www.ocsta.on.ca)

Patrick J. Daly, *President*  
Michael Bellmore, *Vice President*  
Nick Milanetti, *Executive Director*

October 29, 2021

Honourable Stephen Lecce  
Minister of Education  
5th Flr, 438 University Ave,  
Toronto, ON M7A 2A5

Dear Minister Lecce,

### **Re: Modified Semester Requirements, Vaccination Requirements**

Further to my comments at our meeting on October 21, 2021 regarding the challenges our Catholic boards are facing with Hybrid learning and modified semester models at the secondary level, I am writing to you today to comment further on this important matter.

I want to begin, however, by thanking you for your continued effort to promote the well-being of students and staff. The announcement on October 28, 2021 regarding take-home testing kits for students and their cohorts, as well as increased testing requirements for unvaccinated staff, will continue to assist in protecting the health and safety of those in our Catholic school communities. I would as well like to recognize the strong leadership of Catholic School Trustees and most especially the system and school leaders, teachers and support staff for their selfless service and heroic work during this challenging time.

As we have stated to you, the reopening of schools in September has been a positive experience on the whole. In class learning, with the attendant socialization and faith formation opportunities for our students, cannot be consistently achieved through a digital environment for the vast majority of our students.

As you are well aware, secondary schools throughout the province are currently operating with a modified semester model to align with both the Ministry of Education and Public Health COVID-19-related guidelines. This learning model has had a negative impact on student and staff mental health and well-being. On behalf of our 29 Catholic member boards, we strongly encourage the Ministry of Education to permit school boards to make local decisions regarding a return to a normal semestered calendar, with regular cohorts and more normal timetabling.

In order to move to a normal semestered model, Catholic boards require as much time as possible to plan for and implement any changes to COVID-19-related protocols. Accordingly, our member boards would appreciate a timely decision on this matter. We recognize that any decision in this regard would need to be supported by the Chief Medical Officer of Health and local public health units, but it is vital to student and staff well-being that we move in this direction as soon as possible.

On the issue of vaccines, we are aware that Health Canada is reviewing the Pfizer vaccine's suitability for five to 11-year-olds. We want to assure you that OCSTA and Catholic school boards will work with the Ministry of Education, Public Health officials, and our school communities to ensure that the implementation of any vaccination process for children occurs in an efficient and timely manner. In a previous letter, we strongly encourage the government to amend *The Immunization of Schools Pupil Act* to include COVID-19 as one of the mandatory vaccinations for eligible students. We recognize that a decision in support of our recommendation has not yet been made. In the meantime, we will continue to strongly encourage that all eligible staff and students be fully vaccinated.

Thank you Minister for your consideration of our request with regard to this urgent matter and I would be pleased to discuss it with you.

Yours Very Truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. J. Daly', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Patrick J. Daly  
President