

Schools will remain closed through to May 4

Publicly funded schools across Ontario will remain closed to students through at least May 4, the Province announced Tuesday afternoon.

Students were supposed to return to school this Monday after the Province announced its initial school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but Tuesday's announcement came with new measures to help students continue to learn at home, under the guidance of teachers, until the closure can be ultimately lifted.

Our medical experts are telling us that the next two weeks are absolutely critical for Ontario. What we do today will determine what we face tomorrow, said Premier Doug Ford. Effective immediately, we have extended the order to close publicly funded schools until at least May 1 for teachers and May 4 for students. We have also extended the closure of private schools and child care centres for another two weeks. The situation continues to change day by day, hour by hour. In order to protect our children, I am prepared to extend these closures even further if we have to.

Every week, every day, every hour we can push back the surge on our hospitals is another week, day, hour of precious time to prepare. The more time we have, the more lives we can save. If we push that surge as far away from today as possible, we will save lives.

I know, as a parent, nothing is more important than the education of our children. That is why we will continue to support families who are doing their part to stay home and slow the spread of COVID-19.

As such, the Province is working with school boards across Ontario to find ways to help students complete the school year so they can advance to the next year and earn credits and graduate.

In addition to easing the financial burden on university and college students with a six-month grace period through OSAP, new measures are being made for elementary and secondary school students to continue learning as well under the guidance of teachers.

The second phase of the Learn at Home program has been developed in conjunction with education partners with an aim of establishing clarity for parents, enhancing education supports, and creating opportunities for teachers and educators to connect with students.

This phase will work to reconnect students with teachers and other school staff, including mental health workers. Teacher-led learning will be broken down for students between Kindergarten and Grade 3, Grades 4 to 6, Grades 7 to 8, and Grades 9 to 12.

For the youngest group of students, teacher-led learning

will include five hours of work per student per week with a focus on literacy and math. For students in Grades 4 ? 6, five hours of work will be required with a focus on math, literacy, science and social studies. Grade 7 and 8 students will spend ten hours a week with work focused on the same core subjects.

Students in secondary school will see three hours of work per course per week for semestered students while non-semestered students will tackle 1.5 hours per course per week with a focus on achieving/completing credits towards graduation.

For more on the Learn at Home program, visit Ontario.ca/page/learn-at-home.

?The second phase of Learn at Home creates some predictability for our parents, our students and our educators,? said Education Minister Stephen Lecce. ?We're providing expectations that our parents can count on. We're enhancing support for students. We're ensuring the teacher-student relationship is restored throughout this period of school closures. Our aim is to provide all of them with some sense of stability and hope amid this difficulty.

?These are extraordinary times. We're moving quickly with two aims in mind: the first, to keep your child safe and the second is to keep them engaged in learning. I know nothing about this situation is ideal, and we recognize difficulty that parents will face as we go forward. This pandemic has perhaps made the case so clear: we must come together, harness our collective energy, and put our efforts forward to improve the situation of every child and keep them safe from COVID-19.

?Students can and will continue to complete credits underway. This is especially important for senior level students. We're also prioritizing students scheduled to graduate and supporting students on their track to graduate. We're leveraging digital resources, we're embracing all forms of student-teacher connectivity on students' access to technology, meaning one way or another, by printed material or tablet, every child should and will be able to continue learning through the curriculum supported by their teacher.?

By Brock Weir