

January 18, 2022

**Jan Johnstone,  
Bluewater District School Board Trustee**

Municipality of Kincardine  
Township of Huron-Kinloss

Dear Ms. Johnstone

When in-person learning was suspended following the Christmas holiday due to the emergence of the Omicron variant, parents expected that the additional time would be used to improve controls in schools to allow our children to return to in-person learning safely. This new variant presents significant challenges to the education system which necessitate the implementation of additional controls to limit the spread of the virus. Unfortunately, many of the additional measures announced by the Provincial Government are optional or are not available to our students or schools.

This includes:

- Non-fit tested N95 masks which are being provided to education workers on an optional basis. There is no additional benefit to the students if the education workers choose not to wear these masks. The same can be said for the three-ply cloth masks that are being made available to students.
- Temporary measures to reduce contacts, including cohorting measures for elementary students during recess and outdoor breaks. Unfortunately the Ministry Guidelines also allow for classes to be combined if staffing shortages exist which negates any potential reduction in the risk of exposures.
- 3000 additional standalone high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter units being deployed across the province with only 32 allocated to the Bluewater District School Board. There are currently 150 standalone HEPA units deployed in BWDSB schools according to the board website, which represents an average of 3.5 units per school. The additional 32 units will only increase this to 4.2 units per school.

While some parents are welcoming the return to in-person learning, other parents are concerned and many are left feeling like they must choose between the health and safety of their children and their careers.

On behalf of the Elgin Market Home and School Association, we respectfully request that the following additional measures be taken immediately to provide our children with a safe learning environment:

1. Purchasing a sufficient number of standalone HEPA filter units to equip all classrooms regardless of the presence of mechanical ventilation. This would improve safety during nutrition breaks when students have no choice but to remove their masks.

2. Offer parents the option to transition to virtual learning in the short term with the ability to return to in-person learning when the current spike in COVID-19 cases eases.
3. Continued tracking and reporting of confirmed and suspected COVID-19 cases to parents of impacted students.

We would be happy to discuss our requests further and we look forward to receiving a positive response. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rory Cavanagh". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rory Cavanagh  
President of the Elgin Market Public School (EMPS) Home & School (H&S) Association, on  
behalf of the EMPS H&S Association Executive

Copied to:

Jane Thomson, Chair, Board of Trustees, Bluewater District School Board  
Lori Wilder, Director of Education, Bluewater District School Board  
Hon. Lisa Thompson, MPP Huron-Bruce  
Hon. Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education  
Hon. Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario  
Sarah Thomson, President, Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations