

NEWS RELEASE

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STF Urges Government Response to Increased COVID-19 in Schools

SASKATOON – The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation is calling on the Government of Saskatchewan and Minister of Education to acknowledge the rate of COVID-19 transmission in schools and take immediate action to protect students' health and their access to education.

“Minister Duncan has a responsibility to ensure the safety of students while in school. I urge him to demonstrate the leadership required of his role and implement consistent, logical measures to keep students and our communities safe,” said STF President Patrick Maze. “Transmission is occurring in schools and it will not improve without action.”

Maze says provincial COVID-19 data and experiences from the front lines tell a story of an education system that is under pressure and one where students' needs aren't being fully met despite the unwavering efforts of teachers and school staff.

“Our health-care system is in crisis. The same decisions that created that crisis are being felt in schools throughout the province. Significant in-school transmission is occurring. Because of the confusion, lack of coordination and system failures, we simply don't know the full extent,” said Maze. “What we do know is students' health, mental well-being and education are being impacted for the third school year in a row; we also know what measures can reduce the risk and impact.”

In a letter yesterday, the Federation asked the government to address the most pressing issues,

including breakthrough cases in vaccinated school staff; inconsistent approaches to declaring outbreaks and isolation requirements; increasing difficulties securing substitute teachers; and significant delays in contact tracing.

The Minister of Education's last significant comments to media regarding COVID-19 were on August 23, defending the government's decision to not require masks in schools across the province prior to the start of the school year, despite doctor recommendations.

"Teachers are not only burning out, but they are also fearful for the health of those too young to be vaccinated. Youth have made significant sacrifices in this pandemic and deserve better," said Maze. "I am urging the Minister of Education to immediately address the serious situation in our schools."

The Federation has also requested reinstatement of the Education Sector Response Planning Team. This team was disbanded along with the lifting of all public health measures in Saskatchewan in July 2021. The STF has not received a response from government but is prepared and willing to work alongside government and sector partners to address the health crisis affecting families across the province.

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