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Premier Doug Ford  
Legislative Building  
Queen's Park  
Toronto ON M7A 1A1

July 23, 2021

Dear Premier Ford,

We are just weeks away from back to school, yet your government has made little to no progress on ensuring that students will be able to learn safely in-person come September.

Kids in Ontario have spent 26 weeks in online school since the start of the pandemic -- that's more than anywhere else in the country.

And it's having severe impacts on their mental health and well-being.

Rates of depression, anxiety, eating disorders and suicides have all increased.

And according to a number of leading hospitals in the province, 70 percent of children ages 6 to 18 in Ontario have said the pandemic has harmed their mental health.

Experts agree that the best place for kids to be is in the classroom. Schools should be the last to close and the first to open.

But making sure kids can go safely back to school in September and ensuring they stay open will take proper investments so students, educators and staff are protected from COVID-19.

Teachers and support staff have worked so hard over the past 18 months to make the best out of a challenging situation. They deserve, at the very least, to be safe in their workplace.

That's why I'm calling on you to implement the following **Ontario Greens Safe Schools Plan** that includes:

- **Ventilation improvements**, including HEPA filters in all Ontario classrooms
- Investing in more and **higher quality PPE**, including N95 masks, for teachers, students and staff
- **Lowering class sizes to 15** to allow for appropriate physical distancing
- A robust, accessible and low-barrier **testing and tracing system** to control and mitigate COVID outbreaks
- Ensuring as many students as possible **over age 12 are fully immunized** (double vaccinated for at least two weeks) by the first day of school
- A plan to proactively ensure elementary teachers and education staff are fully immunized to protect children under the age of 12 who are currently ineligible to receive vaccines.
- A province wide tracking system on how many education workers, staff and eligible students are fully vaccinated.

We have to acknowledge and address the toll the pandemic and online school has had on kids' mental health. Everything is not ok. They need and deserve more help and support.

That's why I'm calling on you to make students' mental health and well-being a priority as they head back to school by:

- Committing to ending plans for **hybrid learning** and **quadmesters** that have negative impacts on student mental health and quality of learning
- Ensuring a sufficient number of **mental health professionals** are available at every school
- Implementing a **province-wide school lunch program** to address issues of food insecurity, household economic instability and eating disorders which have been exacerbated by the pandemic

We can't keep putting the burden of schooling on parents. They're already shouldering so much responsibility, and online learning has forced many parents (and disproportionately women) to leave their jobs as they play the role of teacher, parent and professional all at once. Parents are desperate to know what the plan is with just six weeks to go until September when schools resume, and with the start of 11 month schools just around the corner.

So Premier, let's have a clear, comprehensive and transparent plan to get kids safely back in school. The clock is ticking.

I'm looking forward to working collaboratively to make sure kids in Ontario can get back to school and have a safe and healthy September and beyond.

Sincerely,

Mike Schreiner  
Leader, Green Party of Ontario

Cc Stephen Lecce

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