

May 11, 2020

Dear Trustees,

ETT stands together with our esteemed OSSTF colleagues to implore the board to consider, as well, further reflections. The light speed at which emergency remote teaching and learning practices are being implemented by our members for our very youngest learners is remarkable, and at the end of Education Week, we at ETT commend them. They are truly miracle workers, when in other sectors establishing sound and effective standards of practice could take months.

I urge you, as well, as I am understanding there is an emergency motion to be brought forward, to please consider the following as you review the legal and prohibitive grounds for decision-making as well as the pedagogical efficacy of approaches, that:

ETT has been having professionally collaborative round table discussions with our management partners at the board since the closure about what emergency distance learning should look like. We have emphasized repeatedly and there is an understanding all around, that effective remote learning is different than “synchronous” learning. Safety, privacy & family status issues are at play if live-streaming is imposed. We need the Minister to be reflective on this piece; perhaps he has not distinguished this.

During this pandemic, educators around the world are doing their utmost to hold the world, their communities, their families and their students as they care for their own health and well-being, while engaging their own children and those in their classrooms in learning. We are using best practices with all our integrity and expertise as professionals and pedagogues. We use professional judgement about methods and practice. Standards of practice for distance learning in other sectors take months in a regular climate.

We learn from our members that pre-recorded lessons, narrations and materials w/ posted activities and feedback afford flexibility for families in differing home contexts at any time of day. Synchronous scenarios don't offer that. Pausing, replaying and chunking (recorded) segments provides IEP accommodations. Equity issues are, indeed, tantamount. Synchronous learning heightens equity issues. Not all students have access to a quiet place in their home to participate in synchronous learning, nor do all teachers. Professional boundaries are a significant matter for consideration. Members must carefully consider how they will maintain professional boundaries during interactions with students while providing instruction. Cell phones make it very easy for students or parents to tape online interactions that could then be shared via social media with others. Recordings could be modified to change the tone, intent or message of what was said. Our members must be extra vigilant and cautious when online with students. Allegations against educators must be investigated by boards and causes significant stress for the members involved. Our safety, our privacy and our own family status issues are paramount as we navigate emergency distance learning.

Violence in the home is a reality for many women, children, men and 2SLGBTQ+ peoples. Many students may have already been witness to violence or experience it on a regular basis. Canada's Minister for Women and Gender Equality reported a 20 to 30 per cent increase in rates of gender-based violence and domestic violence in some regions of the country due to the COVID-19 crisis, with some shelters in Ontario experiencing a 400% increase in calls for help.

These are realities in our communities. We are concerned that strategies related to safety and security including ways to protect 'meetings' and how to shut down meetings immediately have not been provided through board inservice; Clear explanations about issues such as what to do about reporting an inappropriate incident, and how to deal with students who may have been witness to harassment or racism. Strategies to immediately address any non-students such as parents/ guardians/ older siblings who appear to be in the 'meeting'; and considerations for where such 'meetings' take place in the home and awareness of art work, books and other items or people in the background deemed inappropriate. These are our looming and very serious concerns for our members around synchronous learning.

Thank you for your consideration of these items as you reflect on what is before you. We appreciate that the board has always respected teacher professional judgement of our members regarding our pedagogy and practice in the regular school setting. We continue to appreciate the constructive dialogue and understanding together as we sit at our respective tables to bring the very best to our students and families through this pandemic and beyond.

Yours truly,

Joy Lachica
ETT President