

In-class learning won't resume until September: Province

By Brock Weir

Ontario students won't finish off the 2020-2021 academic year in classrooms.

The Province announced Wednesday that remote learning will continue Ontario-wide for the remainder of the school year.

In making their decision, the Government cited the prevalence of the B.1.617.2 COVID-19 variant to keep schools shuttered for a few more months, and efforts to "support a safer summer and return to in-person learning in September."

"At a time when our top priority is putting the third wave behind us so that we can safely enter Step One of our Roadmap to Reopen, we can't risk increased cases and potential downstream impacts on hospitals and ICUs," said Premier Doug Ford in a statement. "Making this tough decision now will allow kids to safely enjoy camps and outdoor activities this summer, and a safe return to school in September."

Data presented by the Province indicated that if schools re-opened now, Ontario could see an increase of "six to 11 per cent" in the number of new daily COVID-19 cases and going forward with a re-opening would "threaten Ontarians' hard-fought progress in beating the third wave and could delay the safe return to many summer activities for kids, including day and overnight camps, sports leagues and public pools."

"While this decision was not made lightly, it has been done with one aim: protect the summer for families and deliver a stable and safe September for students," said Minister of Education Stephen Lecce. "We are looking forward and taking action by getting all education workers and students vaccinated with both doses ahead of September, while investing an additional \$2 billion to ensure students and staff are safe."

To this end, the Province underscored the availability of the Pfizer vaccine to Ontarians 12 years of age and older, encouraging families who have not yet received a shot to attend a clinic "as quickly as possible."

It wasn't all bad news, however, for students hoping for a return to the classroom.

The Government announced it will allow school boards to invite graduating classes to small outdoor celebrations to celebrate their achievements.

"Students have worked incredibly hard throughout the pandemic, with important milestones like graduation ceremonies impacted," they said. "Ontario students deserve this positive conclusion to their academic journey, safely. The government will allow school boards to invite graduating students in elementary schools (by class) and secondary schools (by homeroom/quadrimestered class) to return to school in June for a short, outdoor celebration where physical distancing is possible."