

Investments in school ventilation will help students return to normal: Ministry

By Brock Weir

A further investment on improving ventilation in schools will support a safe return for students this fall, according to the Ministry of Education.

Education Minister Steven Lecce announced an investment of a further \$25 million towards upgrading school ventilation systems in an announcement made in York Region last week.

The focus of the investment will be to ensure all occupied classrooms, gyms, libraries, and other instructional spaces without mechanical ventilation will have standalone HEPA filters in place when classes resume.

With yesterday's [Tuesday, August 4] release of health and safety measures for schools, students have a safe path to return to a more normal in-person full-time learning environment, which is critical to their mental and physical health, said Lecce. We are following the best expert advice by ensuring all schools have improved air ventilation, including deploying an additional 20,000 HEPA units, in total over 70,000 ventilation devices, to help ensure schools remain as safe as possible. With the work we have done, I am confident we will keep students and staff safe in our schools as we reopen for the 2021-2022 school year.

Standalone HEPA filter units, the Ministry said, have been identified by the Ontario Science Table, as a strategy for classrooms and spaces with ventilation challenges.

As the filters roll out, the province will provide school boards with a new reporting tool on ventilation improvements which are designed to communicate school-level ventilation measures online to ensure that information is publicly available across the Province, including inspection, use of standalone HEPA filter units, use of higher-grade filters and more frequent filter changes

We appreciate the Ontario government's evidence-based investment in ventilation and air filtration to help reduce COVID-19 transmission in schools, said Dr. Karim Kurji, York Region's Medical Officer of Health. I have always maintained reopening schools is the utmost priority to support children's learning development and mental health. There is benefit to improving ventilation in indoor settings to enhance both overall indoor air quality and COVID-19 risk reduction in schools.