

August 5, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

As School Boards prepare for the reopening of schools in September with the context of Stage 3 of the Province of Ontario's COVID-19 Framework, we recognize that there are limitless considerations within a short timeline. As VOICE for Deaf and Hard of Hearing SEAC Representatives, we want to assist by highlighting the unique impacts of COVID-19 on D/deaf and hard of hearing students and provide recommendations with regards to learning this fall:

As outlined by the Ministry of Education, one of the key roles of the Special Education Advisory Committee is to make recommendations respecting matters affecting the establishment, development, and delivery of special education programs and services for exceptional pupils. Now as much as ever, the role of SEAC is critical to ensure we are each contributing our specialized knowledge to the collective good in the best interests of the kids and students. As stated in Sick Kids' COVID-19: Recommendations for Reopening Schools highlights, we as parents and SEAC representatives share in the goal of maximizing children's health and minimizing it from a Public Health perspective.

- **PPE and use of cloth masks:** Cloth masks present unique challenges for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. Speech is muffled by the wearing of masks and it eliminates the student's ability to lip read. Clear masks and accessible face shield options are recommended to ensuring accessibility <https://www.rapidresponseppe.com/>
- **Communication supports:** FM systems are ever more critical as Deaf and Hard of Hearing students face increased barriers in accessing speech and language in the classroom. Hardware providers have created [Guidelines for Sanitizing Rogers Classroom Products.](#)
- **Virtual instruction:** It is essential that closed captioning be available through the selected virtual learning tools. Where applicable, software with chat features where students can type their discussion is preferred. In the case of pre-reading students, advance notice of the content of the lessons is vital for parents to be able to support their child ahead of the class so that they can participate.
- **Special education supports:** Clearly communicate to parents how to access their child's IPRC and IEP supports and resources, for example, how will Itinerant Teachers D/deaf and hard of hearing be working with students?

While we recognize that school must look very different this September, we have an opportunity to collaborate to ensure all D/deaf and hard of hearing, whatever their family's choice, are not further isolated and excluded from their learning and their peers. We have a shared goal that every child has the opportunity to realize their full potential.

Sincerely,

SEAC Representative
VOICE for deaf and hard of hearing Children