



Virtual LEARNING

Creating Access to Learning for Students

It is ETFO's expectation that elementary virtual learning in any capacity, including through hybrid models of instruction, will end once the pandemic ends.

ETFO firmly believes that the daily, in-person model of instruction and support best meets the educational, developmental and social needs of students, provides the best experience for support, and is the most equitable learning model for all students.

We know that educators are eager to be back with their students in their classrooms. Your union will continue to demand action from the government, school boards and public health units to ensure in-person learning and support can resume quickly and safely.

At this time, when in-person learning has paused for many educators because of the pandemic, ETFO is providing this resource to assist you in exercising professional judgement, delivering quality learning and supporting students.

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Limited Access To Technology and What it Means

In some areas of Ontario, access to cell towers, proper technology devices and high-speed WIFI can be problematic in supporting distance learning for students, parents and caregivers, and for educators during the pandemic. Although this is not a new issue, the lack of access highlights socio-economic, class and regional disparities.

Class disparities also widen this access gap. Single parents and caregivers, and/or parents and caregivers that are working with full time employment but not earning a living wage, cannot offer the support required so that their children can participate in online learning during the pandemic. Additionally, some households have many members sharing one device.

Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada has reported that in 2017 only 37% of rural households had access to high-speed internet (50/10 Mbps), compared with 97% of urban households. Further, the data indicated that only 24% of Indigenous communities had access to internet that meet the basic distance learning requirements.

For more background information on internet access and use, read the report on [High-Speed Access for All: Canada's Connectivity Strategy](#).

The Ministry of Education is aware of these technology gaps. As we learn about students and families who may not have the technology and virtual access required to participate in learning during the pandemic, it is vital that educators continue to provide advocacy and support to marginalized communities.

Members should contact administrators and school boards to ask the questions and problem-solve for optimal technology to enable all students to succeed.

Supporting Students With Disabilities and Special Needs

The Ontario Human Rights Commission has identified [barriers](#) that affect students with disabilities. While schools have a duty to accommodate students during the pandemic, households may not have the adequate resources to support learners when it comes to a quiet space to focus, professional support for one-on-one instruction or access to teaching resources that meet student needs.

Finding online resources that are appropriate for differentiated instruction during the pandemic can be challenging. Members should draw from professional experience and knowledge of your students' needs to choose resources that are culturally relevant and personally meaningful.

When searching for teaching resources:

- **ensure that videos have closed captioning for students who are deaf or hard of hearing;**
- **use descriptive videos to support visually impaired students;**
- **select texts that have appropriate fonts and adjustable sizes to ensure readability; and**
- **be cautious with online games that have flashing images and sounds that can trigger seizures and panic attacks.**

Don't forget that there are specialists at your school and in your school board who are also willing and able to assist you with other ways to accommodate students with special needs.

For additional resources, check the following:

[PRS Matters #108 Accessibility Tips for e-Learning](#)

[Ontario Human Rights Commission's Appropriate Accommodations](#)