

***Please see below. Sent on behalf of Paul Wozney, NSTU President.
This will be forwarded to NSTU members with NSTU webmail accounts.***

Dear NSTU members,

First, I want to thank you for your dedication to supporting students, families and one another during this week of remote learning. You have done an exceptional job continuing to provide high quality educational opportunities for students, and it was good to hear the Premier acknowledge this yesterday.

Given the concerns we heard from you through the survey that so many of you contributed to, the NSTU was encouraged by the decision to initiate remote learning following the extended school break. Still, we have continued this week to advocate for teacher and student safety and recommended that remote learning be extended until case numbers decline sharply. Earlier today, Newfoundland and PEI both announced that remote learning would be extended for at least one more week.

The Provincial Government has acknowledged and taken some steps to address the NSTU's apprehension regarding school ventilation, masks and rapid test availability. Rest assured that we will continue to monitor how these measures are being implemented and respond accordingly.

I know many of you are anxious about the announcement yesterday, reconfirming that schools will re-open to in-person learning for the general student population on Monday, January 17. Like you, I felt the conflict in the messaging that the pandemic situation is grave, while schools are considered safe.

The NSTU has been assured that student mask compliance will be a high priority for school administrators. Masking is an OHS issue and the employer has a duty to enforce this vital public health order. Nonetheless, the NSTU continues to be concerned that the education system, once in-school classes resume, will experience operational pressures, similar to what was experienced prior to the Christmas break, which will result in unplanned school closures. Premier Houston acknowledged yesterday that parents should expect school closures due to outbreaks and staff shortages.

The NSTU continues to seek answers about how contact tracing will occur in school, which you indicated was the most critical element to keeping your classrooms safe in our recent survey. With only one work day until the resumption of in-person learning we are requesting that Government clarify what teachers should expect when a student reports being Covid positive to a school. Will the entire school community be informed? And, how are staff to exercise "personal responsibility" and meet their obligation to protect students if they are not fully aware of the situation?

We know you have questions about quarantine leave/sick leave related to close contact notifications. NSTU staff have created multiple online resources (<https://nstu.ca/coronavirus>) to assist members who have employment, health and safety concerns. Further, we remind all of you again that you have rights under the NS OHS Act to refuse unsafe work. The materials we have provided to support you in this process are linked at the site above as well.

Staff continue to be available to assist members but please be advised that while call and email volumes are high, staff are working hard to respond in a timely manner. Your patience is appreciated. As new information is made available, it will be provided to members.

In solidarity,
Paul

Paul Wozney, NSTU President