

February 9, 2021

Memorandum to: Medical Officers of Health
Associate Medical Officers of Health
Chief Nursing Officers
Public Health Unit School Health Managers

Directors of Education
School Authorities
School Board COVID-19 Leads
School Mental Health Leaders
Superintendents with Responsibility for Mental Health

From: Dr. David Williams
Chief Medical Officer of Health

Nancy Naylor
Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education

Subject: School Public Health Nurses and COVID-19: Role
Clarification Resource

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to keeping our school communities safe. Entering 2021, the health, safety, and well-being of students and staff remains a top priority.

The purpose of this memo is to provide an update on the School-Focused Nurse initiative in Public Health Units (PHUs) and to share a resource to support the ongoing work of Public Health Nurses (PHNs) in schools and school communities.

As part of the Government of Ontario's plan to safely reopen schools, PHUs have been provided with an additional \$62.5 million to hire up to 625 school-focused nurses to provide rapid-response support to school boards and schools in facilitating public health and preventative measures relating to COVID-19, including screening, testing, tracing, and mitigation strategies. To date, through significant recruitment and onboarding efforts, PHUs have filled 623 of the 625 nursing positions. Strong partnerships between PHUs, school boards, and schools have enabled the rapid implementation of this initiative and have been a key contributor to maintaining the safety of Ontario's schools.

School-focused nurses have a key role in supporting schools in planning, preventing, and responding to COVID-19. They partner with the entire school community – students, staff, and families – to build healthy school communities that promote student well-being and support learning. Over the first two months of the 2020-21 school year

alone, the new school-focused nurses led or significantly contributed to a COVID-19 IPAC assessment in over 3,000 schools, and provided over 54,000 consultations to schools, school boards, and families across the province on issues such as testing, screening, surveillance, infection prevention and control, and outbreak management.

Informed by key learnings from the first few months of implementation, the attached *School Public Health Nurses and COVID-19: Role Clarification Resource* has been developed to support PHUs, school boards, and schools to continue to develop their working relationships and prioritize the work of the School PHNs. The resource serves to clarify the role and full scope of supports that the additional COVID-19 School PHNs can provide, and to distinguish their work from the roles of other nurses already in place to support school communities. Recognizing that there is diversity in how PHUs provide COVID-19 support to schools and communities across the province, depending on the local context, the resource is general in nature and may be adapted by the local PHU to represent more specific nursing roles and public health supports in your region.

The resource was developed by a working group convened by the *Education Sector – Preparedness and Outbreak Planning Table* (ES-POP), with representation from the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, Public Health Ontario, PHUs, school system administrators, and the Ontario Association of Public Health Nursing Leaders. It is intended to support communication between PHUs and local school communities, to increase understanding of public health nursing, and to facilitate planning and prioritization of nursing and school health supports. This resource may be used in conjunction with provincial policy guidance, including the Ministry of Health’s [School Health Guideline, 2018](#) (or as current) and the Ministry of Education’s [Foundations for a Healthy School](#), as well as locally-adopted tools and processes for public health and education sector program planning.

Thank you once again for your ongoing partnership in supporting safe and healthy school environments.

Sincerely,

David C. Williams, MD, MHSc, FRCPC
Chief Medical Officer of Health

Nancy Naylor
Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education