



Media Release

1,500 Staff Vaccinated to Keep Students with Special Education Needs In-Class

March 17, 2021 – For many of our students with special education needs, the best learning environment is in-person instruction. That’s why this group of students have been in school with their teachers and educational assistants since January while the majority of DSBN and Niagara Catholic students were learning remotely. They are our most vulnerable students, and we want to ensure they stay in school with their educators, getting the support they need.

We are thankful that Niagara Region Public Health and Niagara Health have helped protect our students with special education needs, their families, and staff by vaccinating approximately 1,500 DSBN and Niagara Catholic educators who directly support students with special needs.

“Staff are crucial for many of our students with special education needs, and they deserve to have access to the support they require when they’re learning,” said Sue Barnett, DSBN Chair of the Board. “This is an important step forward for Niagara.”

Special education staff help students reach their highest potential by working with them closely, often providing direct support to meet the needs of every individual child. This includes being there to help with daily living skills like feeding, assisting them with self-regulation, and equipping students with ways to promote their safety.

“Our goal is for every student to continue learning in class, and to keep them, our families, and staff safe. To do this, we are continuing to work with Niagara Region Public Health to expand vaccine eligibility to all staff who work directly with students in our schools each day,” said Warren Hoshizaki, DSBN Director of Education.

“The safety and well-being of our students and staff is the most important consideration for Niagara Catholic, and ensuring that staff who work with some of our most vulnerable students are vaccinated is the best way to prevent the spread of coronavirus,” said Larry Huibers, Chair of the Niagara Catholic’s Board of Trustees.

Niagara Catholic Director of Education Camillo Cipriano noted that a safe return to school is the goal for everyone in Niagara and reinforced the importance of having all school staff vaccinated as quickly as possible.

“Teachers teach best, and students learn best when they have human connections,” he said. “Their mental health and well-being and connection to the lessons they are learning improves when they engage in-person. We are grateful to Niagara Region Public Health for including education as part of this early vaccine program, and look forward to vaccinating more staff throughout the spring.”

In January, [the province announced](#) that educators will be eligible to receive vaccines as part of Phase Two of Ontario's immunization program. Minister of Education Stephen Lecce stated that he will further advocate for the importance of school staff being vaccinated, noting how critical education is for our children and families. We will continue to work with the province and our devoted local health partners to do what we can to keep our students learning in their classrooms, where we strongly believe they learn best.

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