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March 22, 2022

Angela Kennedy
Chair, Toronto Catholic District School Board
80 Sheppard Ave. E.
Toronto, ON M2N 6E8

Dear Ms. Kennedy:

Re: Update on COVID-19 Protocols

Thank you for the opportunity to share information with you on supporting the health of students at Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB). This letter is in response to the motion from your committee meeting on Thursday March 10, 2022, with the request for Toronto Public Health (TPH) to send written communication to address the changes to the Ministry of Education guidelines.

At the beginning of the pandemic, as COVID-19 was a new virus, we were only starting to learn about how it was transmitted. Two years later, we have a greater understanding of how this virus spreads from person-to-person and the body's response to infection. We can now detect, diagnose, and treat COVID-19 more effectively and we have tools, including vaccines and therapeutics, to better protect ourselves against serious health outcomes of COVID-19.

As has been the case throughout the pandemic, policy related to schools is within the provincial government's purview. This includes all policies related to mask mandates in schools. Further, with the most recent update to the Reopening Ontario Act, local medical officers of health are precluded from issuing Letters of Instruction to implement local measures, including the requirement that masks be worn in schools or other locations.

Even in the absence of regulations requiring their use, masks continue to be an important part of our community's COVID response. We can still use well-fitting, high-quality masks to protect our health alongside vaccination, staying home when sick, screening and other protective measures. We encourage the TCDSB to ensure that their schools are mask-friendly places, to help people who choose to wear a mask to do so, including continuing to provide mask breaks for those staff and students during the school day. As has been the case throughout the pandemic, the team here at TPH stands prepared to support the TCDSB and all its schools in this regard.

Toronto Public Health has worked closely throughout the pandemic with the TCDSB to provide recommendations and guidance that are evidence-informed and timely, to keep schools as safe as possible. Additionally, TPH and our Team Toronto vaccination partners have

successfully collaborated with TCDSB senior and school staff to offer COVID-19 vaccination clinics at school sites for staff, students and their families.

The excellent work of school staff to support these clinics during school hours and after hours has contributed to the high rates of COVID-19 vaccine coverage in our community, with first dose vaccination rates approaching 60 per cent for 5-11 year-olds and 95 per cent for 12-17 year-olds. This is a testament to the incredible partnership between TPH and the TCDSB to ensure that vaccination, the most effective measure to combat COVID-19, is available to those in school settings.

We also recognize that based on the potential for the emergence of new variants and the spread of COVID-19, and as stated by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, there may be a time in the future when the Province reinstates mask mandates. As such, my team and I will continue to work with the Province and the Chief Medical Officer of Health to closely monitor the key public health and health care system indicators and work closely with you and your team at the TCDSB.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "E. de Villa".

Eileen de Villa, MD, MBA, MHSc, CCFP, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health

cc. Brendan Browne, Director of Education