



July 20, 2020

Adrienne Batra, Editor-in-Chief
Anthony Furey, National Columnist
The Toronto Sun

Dear Ms. Batra and Mr. Furey,

The *Toronto Sun* article, [*“Science Table calls for mask, distancing rules to be dropped in schools”*](#) (Anthony Furey, July 19) includes two significant errors of fact in the headline and lede; we are writing to request a correction.

The headline reads: *Science Table calls for mask, distancing rules to be dropped in schools*

The lede then reads: *The Ontario Science Table has released a report co-authored by researchers from SickKids Hospital that calls for the return of most normal activities in schools this fall along with a stepping away from many COVID-19 protocols such as masks, physical distancing and cohorting.*

Both sentences are incorrect.

Table 1 of the paper ([*“School Operation for the 2021-2022 Academic Year in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic”*](#)) describes a precise framework that relates measures to be taken inside a school to the community context of SARS-CoV2 spread.

The table includes three scenarios. Only in a scenario of low SARS-CoV2 risk does the framework advise “permissive masking and distancing”. Note that this is not necessarily ‘dropping’ either of those two measures. In the two other scenarios – moderate and high SARS-CoV2 risk -- the framework *does* specify masking, distancing and cohorting as appropriate by age

This is a crucial distinction. The premise of the whole paper is that Ontario continually match public health measures, including measures to be taken inside schools, to the actual state of the COVID19 pandemic in Ontario. If Ontario is in a state of moderate or high spread in September, it would *not* be appropriate to ‘drop’ masking and social distancing requirements in schools. And even in a low-risk environment, schools may decide to keep these measures. Raising an inaccurate expectation of a blanket end to public health measures inside schools is harmful to Ontario’s students, parents, teachers, school administrators, and leaders.

It is thus incorrect to say that the paper has called on Ontario to drop these important safeguards. Rather, it calls on Ontario to keep schools open -- barring catastrophic circumstances -- and to match rules inside schools to pandemic circumstances in the community at that time.

Finally, the headline incorrectly attributes the paper to the 'Ontario Science Table'. The lede then incorrectly attributes the paper to the 'Ontario Science Table and researchers from Sick Kids'. In fact, the Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table and the Hospital for Sick Children co-authored the paper with a number of other institutions, including : Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (site for one of the lead authors), Unity Health, Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, Children's Hospital at London Health Sciences Centre, McMaster Children's Hospital, and the Kingston Health Sciences Centre.

I am grateful for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Robert Steiner,
Communications Director,
Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table

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