### 1. A phased-in return

While we all want to see children returning to attending school five days a week when it is safe and possible to do so, there is no compelling reason for having every student return on the very first day. Ontario schools have often done staggered re-entries in the past; for example, it has not been unusual to welcome kindergarten children into schools a few days before the rest of the students return in September. Internationally, several jurisdictions have managed to control the spread of COVID-19 by instituting a gradual return to schools for students. Often, this has been done by grade level, but it could also be done by cohort. Denmark, for example, was one of the first countries to re-open schools and is considered to have done so successfully on April 15, the equivalent of K-5 students began a phased return with older students returning just over a month later. Some other countries, such as Germany, began with their most senior students to provide support for their final year of schooling and successful graduation.

As schools re-open, there will be many new behaviours and routines to be learned by students, staff and families, and it would be best to avoid hundreds of students and staff all experiencing this on day one.

There is a strong argument to be made for trying things out and seeing what is working. A phased-in return could take a number of forms, again dependent on local 21 113I0.00000vely,fs4(y)]TJys ba

#### Here are some ideas for prioritizing student and educator mental health:

Fully attend to all health requirements to make re-entry into school as safe as possible, including effective testing and tracing in the community to minimize the spread of COVID-19.

There should be no rush into curriculum expectations, and no pressure exerted on teachers or students to meet them immediately.

The return to school should be a joyful experience for students, with ample opportunities provided for them to feel comfortable and at ease, so as to mitigate



While physical health and safety specific to COVID-19 is the top priority, students overall physical health has been affected by the period of remote learning. A majority of 9 to 15 year olds surveyed in Toronto reported sleeping more, being less physically active, and not spending enough time outside (Maximum City, 2020). In Denmark, part of their success has included outdoor learning and use of community facilities, including times when community parks are reserved for children to use.

#### 7. Protect the adults

In education, the well-being of students is top-of mind; the well-being of the adults in the school environment sometimes less so. While always important, t

funded schools are 50 and older, and we know that older adults are more at risk for COVID-19 infection and for more serious consequences of the illness. School boards will need to carefully consider what precautions they will need to put in place to ensure that teachers and other adults in the system are not unnecessarily exposed to infection. Plans should also be put in place to support staff with pre-existing conditions. These are conversations



8. Listen to the

10.

## Concluding Remarks

As we consider the range of options and decisions surrounding the safe reschools, we would do well to remind ourselves that nothing is a panacea. The work to be undertaken over the coming weeks and months is about simultaneously trying to plan carefully to meet the needs of students and adults in schools and to provide the best teaching and

# References

Addictions and Mental Health Ontario (AMHO), IPSOS (2020).

(CMHO), &