

March 16, 2020

The Honourable Kelvin Goertzen, M.L.A.
Minister of Education
Room 168 Legislative Building
450 Broadway
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

Dear Minister:

I was pleased to hear that the government is proceeding in an abundance of caution by suspending classes in the K-12 education system effective Monday, March 23, 2020. However, waiting a week to suspend classes is not in line with best practices on social distancing as directed by The Public Health Agency of Canada to help minimize the spread of COVID-19.

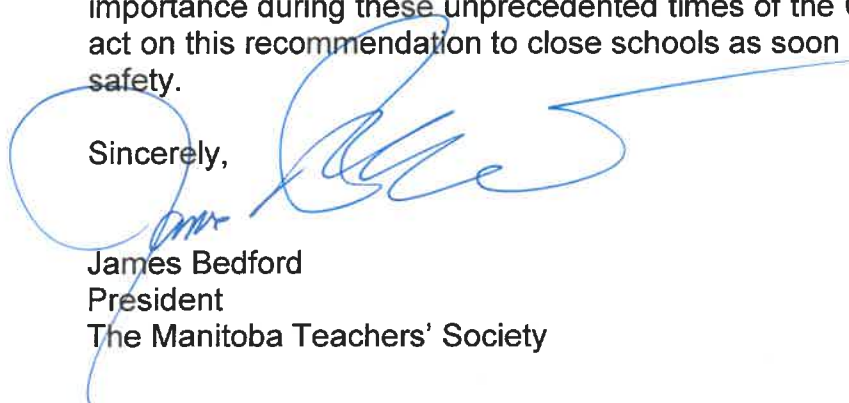
On behalf of the province's 16,000 public school teachers, The Manitoba Teachers' Society is calling for schools to be closed as soon as possible, no later than Wednesday, March 18, 2020 and that educators be permitted to work from home to ensure the continuity of education in these times of uncertainty.

In many classrooms across Manitoba, increasing the distance between desks is not feasible since the classrooms are already crowded. In younger grades, there are no individual desks because the students often sit at round tables. More importantly, we have learned from watching other cities that asymptomatic transmission is possible and that time is of the essence in helping to flatten the curve.

Our members are committed to ensuring the success of each student in their classroom and they will do what is necessary to help their students through this crisis. I have heard from many teachers who were working all weekend to ensure their students would have take-home packages ready for today, so that they can continue with their learning.

The health and safety of everyone in our schools and our community is of paramount importance during these unprecedented times of the COVID-19 pandemic. I urge you to act on this recommendation to close schools as soon as possible in the interest of public safety.

Sincerely,



James Bedford
President
The Manitoba Teachers' Society