



Federation of
Post-Secondary Educators
of BC

August 12, 2021

The Honourable Anne Kang, M.L.A.
Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Training
Room 346 Parliament Buildings
Victoria BC V8V 1X4

Re: Institutional Autonomy Over Safe Campus Decisions

Dear Minister Kang;

I am writing to you on behalf of the 10,000 faculty and staff, including those at 18 public post-secondary institutions, who collectively form the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of British Columbia (FPSE). Our members are concerned about the current return to campus plans at post-secondary institutions, especially the one-size-fits-all approach outlined in the *COVID-19 Return to Campus Guidelines* of July 5.

Guidelines from the Provincial Health Officer should form a minimum set of safety precautions for our institutions. Instead, the *COVID-19 Return to Campus Guidelines* limit the ability to address the unique risks our institutions face. Specifically, they include directives (excerpted below) of what should *not* be done, thereby limiting the ability of post-secondary institutions to provide safe working and learning environments:

“All faculty and staff should follow institutional health and safety prevention measures which continue to be guided by public health, and *not* introduce other or different measures in their work or learning areas” (*Guidelines* 8, emphasis added).

And

“Post-secondary institutions should *not* introduce COVID-19 prevention measures that are different from those supported by public health professionals” (*Guidelines* 3, emphasis added).

The *Guidelines* were created based on an assumption of a low level of community transmission and were created prior to the surge of the Delta variant. Campus safety plans (both the COVID-19 safety plans and the more recent communicable disease plans) have also been developed with the

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assumption of low levels of community transmission. With increasing but highly variable COVID-19 case counts in BC it is disappointing to see individual institutions prevented from voluntarily adopting more comprehensive plans.

Our concerns are well articulated in a letter to you from Dr. Dan Laitsch, President of CUFA BC, dated August 5, 2021. We are joining with CUFA BC in calling on you, Minister Kang, to affirm the autonomy of BC's public universities and colleges to continue to establish the health and safety rules governing safe campuses, such as the introduction of mask or vaccine mandates, modes of course delivery, class size reductions to enable social distancing, and full engagement of Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committees.

We also join CUFA BC in affirming what is necessary is that institutions hold the autonomy to make decisions based on a plurality of factors and informed by the needs of the local campus community.

Our members, like those of CUFA BC, expect their unions and their representatives on campus Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committees to work closely with their administration in developing any policies related to the return to campus. If there must be high level directives, they should err on the side of more safety, not less.

We would welcome a meeting with your ministry to discuss these important points.

Yours sincerely,



Sean Parkinson, Secretary-Treasurer