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Province considers keeping online learning as a permanent option

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The Upper Grand District School Board (UG) says they've received no information or direction on online learning becoming a permanent option for students, as the Ontario government considers its implementation into the education system.

Reports of remote learning becoming a permanent option for students came after a Ministry of Education presentation was obtained by the Globe and Mail.

?If introduced and passed, beginning in September, 2021, parents would continue to have the ability to enroll their child in full-time synchronous remote learning if they choose going forward. School boards would also be required to provide student with remote learning on snow days and in the event of an emergency that results in a school closure,? reads the document.

Following the release of the Ministry's reports on online learning, the Elementary Teacher's Federation of Ontario (ETFO) released a statement last Thursday (March 25).

?The move to virtual learning was never intended to be permanent; it was a temporary measure intended to deliver emergency instruction during a global health crisis. But this was never the Ford government's plan. It's now clear that, throughout the pandemic, they've been working on a virtual learning plan that will divert funds from publicly funded education to private companies,? said Sam Hammond, President of ETFO.

?To be clear, this plan will negatively affect students, increase inequities, lower standards in publicly funded education, and put us one step closer to the privatization of public education.?

UGDSB spokesperson Heather Loney said in an email to the Free Press the move would have ?significant implications? on many areas of school board operations including funding, staff logistics, student supports, and planning for the school year.

?Without further information or direction from the Ministry, it is very difficult for us to speak further as to the possible impacts a move like this could have,? said Loney.

Students in Ontario have been working through both online learning and in-person learning for more than a year now with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The statement from the ETFO also noted that students thrive in an in-person environment for learning where they can learn collaboratively and can be assessed daily.

According to a document from SickKids' they state that, ?full-time remote learning is insufficient to meet the needs of the majority of Ontario children and youth, leads to increased screen time and is likely detrimental to overall health. The document also says that the daily in-person school model is best for the educational and developmental needs of children.

?We do believe that online learning can be suitable for some student but does not meet the learning and well-being need of all students,? wrote Loney to the Free Press.

A decision on implementing online learning permanently in Ontario school boards is expected from the government in the coming weeks.