

Lee Patriquin – Planning for Return to School – 9 July 2020

As an Ontario parent of four school aged children aged 7, 9, 12, and 16, I am incredibly disappointed by the lack of leadership and thought that has gone into forcing the school boards to make decisions about the return to school in September, and the concept of the proposed Hybrid learning plan that could be implemented for the coming school year. I work full-time outside the home as the Residential Projects Coordinator for an Ottawa based Home Builder. We have been struggling for the past three+ months to cope with the COVID-19 crisis. In the beginning my employer was forced to make concessions and allow their employees to work from home on reduced hours (which already negatively affected my annual income). Without any kind of legislation, guidance, or downright forced ruling on how they are supposed to accommodate my employment and salary come September for this proposed hybrid plan, as they are back up and running full swing. I cannot be the only one that feels as though I'm being told to simply "figure it out" on my own, and if I have to quit my job - so be it.

Premier Ford has said repeatedly throughout this pandemic that keeping kids safe is his priority. He has said that he relies on medical advice to make decisions during this pandemic. Medical experts, including those at Sick Kids Hospital in Toronto, are recommending that children in Ontario attend school full time. Keeping kids safe includes their **physical, emotional and mental health**. Children in Ontario have a right to attend school, safely, full time.

Proposing a part-time model begs the question: what are parents supposed to do with the other three days of the week their children are not in school? They will find childcare in other areas—hiring babysitters, nannies, bubbling with other families—making containment and contact tracing a nightmare. Others who have been financially impacted by Covid-19 or who were already struggling before this started won't be able to afford such stopgap measures. Will they end up choosing between childcare, their kids education, and their jobs? The majority of parents who have found the flexibility to be home with their children throughout the end of the past school year barely scraped by trying to keep their children entertained, educated, and working from home at the same time.

As the economy ramps back up, so do work expectations for those work-from-home parents. This is an impossible reality the majority of working parents in Ontario now know all too well.

This plan is elitist and only workable for the upper middle class with the luxury of having an income that already affords them the ability to pay for

daycare, tutoring, or both. It disenfranchises the economically disadvantaged and middle to lower income families with no stay at home parent and/or little to no ability to pay for daycare.

The stark reality of this plan will see many families sinking into poverty as they are forced to leave their jobs to provide care and education for their children. In our society women are statistically more likely to have to take cuts to their working hours and income, or quit working all together, to care for children. The long lasting impacts this will have on our economy and on the equality of women in the workforce is worrisome to say the least.

Especially when you take into account that two areas of the workforce that are most essential during this time are educators and healthcare workers. How will we survive this global pandemic when so many of these essential workers are forced to leave their jobs to care for their children? If you want to know how **MY FAMILY** will "JUST FIGURE IT OUT"; I will have no choice (with a teenager of Babysitting age) but to make her watch her siblings on the other 3 days of the week. They will not be participating in on-line learning as I will be at my CAREER making the money to pay for our EVER INCREASING housing costs and food for my children. I will not quit my job. If they don't fully participate with the days they are expected to be at home e-learning, will they be in jeopardy of failing? I am not a qualified teacher - I can think of no greater theft of labour than this concept. The entire system has been receiving free labour from us parents by stealing it from qualified educators and from our current employers without talk of compensation and job security for being forced to complete a job we are not legally qualified/degree educated to do.

If you want to reboot the economy, you MUST resolve this issue for our children. Use the incredible experts and their ideas you have at your disposal to get kids SAFELY back to school—FIVE DAYS A WEEK. Think outside the box. Look at how other countries have succeeded on this issue. Consider that childcare has been available for essential workers—exposed to the disease on a daily basis in some cases—on a full-time basis for months and have not presented any significant contributions to the pandemic.

What the Ontario Provincial government has put forward is not a return to school plan. It is a failure of leadership in a time when such failure is sure to devastate the citizens of this province and cause irreparable damage to our children's futures. Please, please reconsider your proposed options. The economy depends on it. Part-time attendance in school with online learning is not an acceptable plan.