

Ariel Troster – Planning for Return to School – 9 July 2020

I am here as the parent of an 8 year old student in the OCDSB to express my extreme frustration at the current “plan” to only re-open schools for two days a week of instruction per child.

Safety of children and teachers should be paramount, but with almost no new daily infections in Ottawa and a plethora of empty office buildings and university classrooms, surely a better and more creative plan would allow kids and teachers to spread out in smaller class groups. Of course, this will require outside-the-box thinking and the need to hire more teachers. But surely nothing could be as important as ensuring that kids get an education.

Offering only part-time schooling to kids in Ottawa will be devastating. This will mean parents (mostly women, let's be honest) will not be able to work. It will mean kids from low-income households could be left alone or driven into deeper poverty. Single parents will need to leave the workforce or patch together alternate, unregulated childcare. And it would mean so many of us burnt out parents will face mental health crises.

"Learn at home" equates to little or no education in many cases. Even in our household, with two mothers working from home, we were unable to give our daughter the time and effort required to teach her a grade two curriculum. We had to work! Our child began to show signs of depression over the course of the last few months, refusing to participate in online class meetups and showing little interest in going outside. The mental health crises amongst children is a serious threat, if we don't get them back into a regular schedule with their peers and teachers.

I urge you to re-consider plans for schools NOW and appropriately fund pandemic schooling that allows for a maximum amount of in-class learning. Children have a right to an education and cannot be denied this right for any longer. If this requires further advocacy with the province and the federal government to make this happen, I encourage you to engage parents in this work. What could be more important than public education?