

## **Chris Mallinos – Planning for Return to School – 9 July 2020**

I am the father of a six-year-old about to enter grade 1. Like countless parents, I am utterly dismayed by the Board's proposal to send kids back to school two days a week. Simply put: this hybrid model will be a disaster.

Children have a right to education, and to the social and emotional development that school provides. I've seen in my own son the worrisome consequences of having these things pulled from under him: mood swings, isolation, and anger. And he is not alone. We are witnessing a looming mental health crisis for millions of children. Surely this is more important than re-opening bars and nail salons.

The hybrid model makes out-of-touch assumptions about the reality of working parents. Overwhelmed parents cannot continue to be teachers—while also working. In many cases, this will force parents—mainly women—to quit their jobs to care for their kids. And for what? As we've seen since March, online learning does not work.

Of course re-opening schools is not without risk. Nothing about living in a pandemic is without risk. But with new daily cases in Ottawa now in single digits, denying children their education is the greater risk. And even if parents are able to find child care, this would increase exposure with random people—meaning more risk to children, families and teachers. Part-time school is not a safer option.

Families cannot be asked to pick up the slack for uninspired political leadership. This can be done safely—with ambition and political will. And while the Board's options are limited without more funding, you still have a crucial role to play. We need you to be vocal advocates for our kids and their education. Urge the province to make full-time school a priority. That is your duty as educators. There is so much at stake.