

## DELEGATION

Written statement - Elizabeth Sweeney, Parent

*Note: I do not need to speak if time does not allow and I would like to prioritise Black, Indigenous and POC parents to speak first.*

We don't know if we will send our child back to school in the fall.

I agree with all the parents who feel that 2 days a week is not nearly enough. I have seen my own kindergarten aged child face a deep sadness due to her isolation. The online learning experience of seeing her classmates while still being connected to them - broke a little piece of our child's spirit and after the first session she refused to go back.

I have wept many times, mourning my child's loss of access to her teachers and educators who provided her with so much nourishment, affection, care and empowerment.

I am also personally terrified of getting COVID 19, and we are doing everything we can to reduce our risk of being exposed.

I feel strongly that we need smaller groups, not bigger ones. I know that going back to school means being in contact with over 160 people when we factor in each person in the classroom's social circle and I am not willing to bet on the limited studies we have on whether or not children have the ability to transmit the virus. I find it hard to believe that after years of catching every cold, flu and bug that goes around, that this one is somehow exempt.

I also know that disabled and immunocompromised children and those with parents or grandparents who are, will not have the privilege of returning in September.

I want the OCDSB, like all school boards in this country, to have a doubling or tripling of their budget so we can hire all the teachers and rent all the spaces needed to reopen safely. I want the over 7000 teachers in our board to have a safe place to send their school aged children, because the current plan certainly hasn't considered this need.

But sadly, I know that is unlikely to happen.

So here is what I want you to consider if you must divide our children into smaller groups.

Don't treat our children equally.

I want you to use an equity lens in every difficult choice you have to make. I want you to prioritise the **full-time** return of the children who have the most to lose. Those whose parents will lose their jobs without care. Students who may have to be left alone, or with babysitters because their parents have no other choice. Students who do not have access to food security. Students who are facing family violence or homophobia. The children of essential workers and teachers. Students with disabilities and also racialized and Indigenous students, who have been disproportionately negatively impacted by this pandemic.

And for the rest of us, who will have to navigate more home schooling, because our health or circumstances determine it, we need far better resources. We need help coordinating smaller parent led groups so we can share the work of home schooling and provide our children with limited contact with other children. We need regular access to the OCDSB outdoor educators and centres. We need access to specialised home school educators. We need access to small

group, teacher-led, in person learning opportunities. We met importantly we also need access to mental health counsellors.