

Regina Bateson - Planning for Return to School – 9 July 2020

COMMENT:

The OCDSB needs to acknowledge that if it chooses to adopt a 2 day/week schedule, it is failing its youngest learners.

In the throes of a new and frightening crisis, the closure of Ottawa's schools (and all other public spaces) was necessary back in the spring. But now, thanks to the hard work of Ottawa Public Health, circumstances are vastly different.

With an extensive testing program in place, Ottawa is reporting less than five new coronavirus infections per day. Just yesterday, the new case count was zero – as it has been several times recently.

If this isn't the moment to fully reopen schools – when is? New cases will never drop below zero. And children urgently need a meaningful education – as is their right.

Last spring, one of our sons was in Grade 1. Once schools closed, he got one 30 minute lesson per week. Now our younger sons, who are twins, are both entering kindergarten. Their future teachers have told us that if it is necessary, "virtual learning" will consist of one 30 minute session per week. That's it. This is not a viable plan for teaching young children foundational skills like handwriting, literacy, or numeracy, to say nothing of Early French Immersion.

Families care about their children's education. If the OCDSB adopts indefinite part-time schooling, let me tell you what comes next: The rich will hire private tutors or send their kids to private school. Middle-class parents (mostly mothers) will quit their jobs or reduce work hours and teach their children themselves. Meanwhile, lower-income kids will be left behind, suffering lifelong harm.

Trustees -- is this really the outcome you want to see? If not, you need to stand up and fight. Go on the record denouncing virtual learning as a failure, especially for elementary students. Push back against the provincial government's nonsensical non-plan for the fall. Demand that Doug Ford and Stephen Lecce provide the funding and support needed to safely operate schools full-time.

Our children are counting on you. Please don't let them down.