

Dear Board Members

July 8, 2020

I am writing today to give some perspective on the online education and proposed hybrid models for students in the OCDSB in September from a separated and blended family. We have 4 children, 2 of which are co-parented in different households. Our situation is by no means unique. The most recent census data shows that over 30% of children are in lone-parent or step family situations in this city. This group of children stand to be severely impacted by online schooling and any type of hybrid model. These family situations must be considered when planning for the next school year.

In a two household family a child already has to adapt to inconsistencies and differences between houses. The one constant is daily school. This spring many of these inconsistencies were highlighted and exacerbated with online education. All parents were required to find the time to help navigate online platforms, assignments, google meets and technology. Single parents are hugely disadvantaged in having no other adult in the household to help meet any of these obligations let alone being sole financial supports for their families. Separated families had great inconsistencies where one household has more resources than the other, further exacerbating tensions. At this time there is no legal recourse for increased child support or any other mediation between co-parents. This is creating a huge disparity between some two-household families and further disadvantage to the children in those homes. With a hybrid model of any type the burden of childcare will be unequal on non-school days. Modern separated families follow many different access schedules – from 7 and 7 to 2-2-3 to 2-2-5-5 and more. There is no hybrid model that would give equal time to both parents, thus an unfair burden of childcare expense and a potential for reduced parenting time for one parent over the other. For example one of our sons will only attend in person school when he is at our house. His father will have to manage all the online learning, the expense of childcare, and will also have a disproportion of the parenting time. All legal parenting agreements consider that school aged children attend school full time. It is imperative that this resume in September so our children do not continue to suffer. Even more so single and separated parents will be forced to choose between caring for their children and their employment. This is an impossible choice in which the children suffer either way.

In our situation if the hybrid model was adopted as proposed we would need child care for one child every second week for 2 days a week. This does not exist! We would be forced to pay for at minimum a part time spot, hundreds of dollars a month which we have not budgeted for. Not to mention that there is no child care scenario where any online education is possible. Are we expected to educate our kids at 9 pm after working a 12-hour shift? Ontario's children deserve better, and have the right to a public education.

In our case our children have different last names. If in school days are decided by last name, they will not attend on the same days. We would be forced to choose to withdraw one child all together. How do we make that choice? There are many families with children in different schools, different school boards, and who live outside transportation boundaries. Co-parenting is already a very stressful and difficult situation for most families, the added stress of uncertainty about what will happen with our children's education is making the situation untenable. The only situation which is fair and equitable across the board is a full return to school in September.

Dr Lea Button

Ashton Ontario