

Anatole Papadopoulos - Planning for Return to School – 9 July 2020

I am writing to urge the Board to advocate and plan for schools to open normally (full/regular schedule) for children this fall.

Schooling is essential for learning, development, and mental and physical health. Remote learning has not worked for my primary school-aged children. They don't need more time in front of screens or asynchronous, peerless learning supervised by parents like me trying to work full time at the same time. It's not working, and all the children I know, including my own, are stressed, frustrated, and falling behind. Our teachers tried hard and put in a ton of effort. It's the model that doesn't work.

Health and pediatric organizations and experts — from Sick Kids Hospital to a major American pediatric group to Ottawa's own Alex Munter, President and CEO at CHEO — are calling for the necessary investments and measures to be taken for schools to properly, fully open because of their critical importance to our kids' lives. I hope the province and the OCDSB will heed their advice.

These experts are providing roadmaps for re-opening (e.g., handwashing, cleaning, etc.) that mitigate for the obvious challenges of the indoor setting and higher numbers. They recognize there are significant risks and known impacts of schools remaining closed, not just the risk of COVID. It will take some creativity, investment, and new health measures. If more room is required, I hope Boards — with provincial, municipal, and community support — will spend the weeks ahead identifying and securing that space. This is doable if we treat it as the priority it should be to get children back into a healthy learning environment with their peers and professional educators.

And even if the sole concern of the Board were the transmission of COVID, it's critical to note that part-time schooling will force some families to find other care for their children on non-school days. Each child will be exposed to more people, on a regular basis, creating additional vectors for the disease to spread at schools and in communities. The hybrid model is counterproductive even from a health standpoint.

Please undertake the necessary preparations to open fully in September and get our kids back to school.