

Camille Williams-Taylor, Director of Education
Ottawa-Carleton District School Board
570 West Hunt Club Rd
Nepean, ON
K2G 3R4

July 9, 2020

Dear Camille,

**Re: Written submission for July 9 Ottawa Carleton-District School Board (OCSBD)
– We Need a Better Plan for Return to School in September**

I am writing this letter to urge you and the OCDSB to create a new plan for the return to school in September. The proposed plan, premised on part-time attendance in school with online learning, is not acceptable. We need a plan that more accurately balances the risks of COVID-19 in children, which appear to be minimal, with the harms of being out of school, including negative impacts on our children's physical and mental health. There is strong evidence that the majority of children affected with COVID-19 have mild symptoms. Evidence also shows that school closures (including home schooling) causes significant economic harms to working parents; health care workers and other key workers being forced from work to childcare. The OCDSB should be focused on exploring other measures to address risks associated with school reopening, including through better hygiene practices, reducing student mixing, and staggering school starts; while finding an approach that will create consistency and allow our children to be in school full-time.

I am the parent of two school-aged children (age 3; age 6). Both of my children are registered to attend public school in Old Ottawa South in the fall. The past three months have been very challenging on our family trying to cope with the COVID-19 crisis. I work full-time at a very demanding job (60+ hours a week). My husband also works full-time. We have no family in Ottawa. Home schooling and isolation has affected our children in numerous ways, including impacting their mental health. To think that your proposal for September continues down the same road of home-schooling children on the backs of working parents is incredibly disappointing and short-sighted.

Keeping kids safe includes their physical, emotional and mental health. Being in school full-time will support this in ways that home schooling and online learning cannot. What's more, it is imperative for the economy that children be in school so that parents can work. The part-time model will put incredible pressure on families. Consider with the part-time model that parents will have to care for children during the days of the week their children are not in school. (And if you have more than *one* school-aged child, you may have at least one child home *every day* of the week). Those facing financial difficulties will be forced to choose between childcare and jobs. Evidence shows that this disproportionately affects women. Other parents that can afford to do so will find childcare in other areas—hiring babysitters, nannies, bubbling with other families.

Containment and contact tracing will then be a nightmare, defeating the containment efforts being sought after.

Premier Ford has repeatedly said throughout this pandemic that keeping kids safe is the government's priority and that the government will rely on medical advice to make decisions during this pandemic. But, medical experts, including Toronto's Sick Kids Hospital and Quebec's Association of Pediatricians, are recommending that children attend school to the fullest extent possible. The proposed approach of the OCDSB goes directly against this medical advice. Other jurisdictions around the globe (e.g. Australia, Denmark) have succeeded in returning children to school full time, recognizing how vital it is to the economy and to children's physical, emotional and mental well being. Consider also that childcare has been available in Ontario for essential workers—exposed to the disease on a daily basis in some cases—on a full-time basis for months.

We need to get kids SAFELY back to school—five days a week. I urge you to consult further with parents, guardians and educators about this important issue. The current consultation has been inadequate. For example, the current OCDSB survey does not allow stakeholders real avenues to voice their opinions as there is limited qualitative feedback permitted and the quantitative feedback is so narrow it fails to capture a number of possible responses. As well, the limited opportunity for stakeholders to have their voices heard at today's Board meeting (only 20 minutes on such an important issue) is another example of lack of real consultation. We as parents recognize this is a challenging situation for educators as well. We want to work together, and we would be pleased to consult and propose creative solutions to get our children back to school full time this fall.

I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Gillian Carter

CC: Brett Reynolds, Associate Director
Nadia Towajj, Superintendent of Program and Learning