

“We are walking with our eyes closed into a hurricane”

Letter from Ontario parent opposes school reopenings

An Ontario parent
22 August 2021

A parent with two small children sent the World Socialist Web Site the following letter opposing the Ontario government's decision to reopen schools amid Canada's rapidly surging fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The parent is a supporter of the Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee (CERSC). The CERSC is fighting to mobilize educators, students and parents to close schools to in-person learning, suspend all nonessential production, and secure workers full financial compensation so they can shelter at home and look after their families until the pandemic is brought under control. To attend the CERSC's next meeting on Saturday, August 28, at 1:30 p.m. EST, please email: cercs.csppb@gmail.com

As parents of two small children, my wife and I are feeling very uneasy as the school year fast approaches in Ontario. We are very concerned about what the next few months will look like. The Delta variant is causing alarming increases in infection rates already, even before the calendar changes to September. New scientific information is telling us that children under 12, who will not be vaccinated when school starts, are vulnerable to increased risks of severe illness, Long COVID, significant cognitive decline and death. But this knowledge will be of little comfort for parents who are locked into an in-person learning model as the school year begins.

A lot has changed since schools closed in June. Parents across the province had to declare by last June whether their kids would be enrolled in remote learning for this September. We had little knowledge then of the severity of the Delta variant. Only now is a clearer picture emerging of how dangerous it can be to unvaccinated children under 12. Although the province maintains that parents have a choice between in-person and remote

learning, that choice is limited and does not even exist in many parts of Canada.

Some school boards will not allow you to pull your kids out until January 2022. The earliest time to transition to remote learning in more fortunate school zones is a window in October.

In early August, my wife and I began to have second thoughts about sending our children back to in-person learning. We called our school board and requested a change to remote learning. We were told that we could not change and that the time had passed to choose remote learning for September. We raised concerns about the inadequate return-to-school plan and the emerging data on the dangers of the Delta variant. We were told that no one was working at the board office, and that we would have to contact our principal in early September to request a change to remote learning. The earliest that change could be implemented was the late October window.

When my wife and I made it clear that we did not want our children in school at all in September, I was told that if my children missed 15 consecutive days of school, they would be withdrawn from our neighbourhood school and that child services would be contacted since my wife and I would be breaking the law. We are appalled and livid with that response to our legitimate safety concerns. We are not looking forward to the September discussion with the principal.

Despite all the reassurances and talk about a safe return to in-class learning from politicians, school boards and the chief medical officer in Ontario, I do not trust, nor do I believe that a safe return to full in-class learning is possible. My skepticism does not stem from any conspiracy theory or superstitious beliefs. Rather, it is informed from what I see already happening around the world where children have returned to school. Kids are

already getting sick. Parents are losing their children to the Delta variant as we speak in the United States; yet the alarm bells are not ringing in Ontario. We are walking with our eyes closed into a hurricane.

The reality is that classrooms will not be safe for a full return to school in two weeks' time. Every classroom in Ontario will not have HEPA filters. Ventilation systems will not be upgraded in every school in the province. Cloth masks will not be effective against Delta. Children will not be issued K95 masks. All this talk of having mandatory vaccinations for every adult around our children in some kind of protective invisible wall will not work. The Delta variant will find itself into crowded classrooms, and infection will spread like wildfire.

Schools are vectors for transmission. They are not isolated islands apart from the community. Children will get infected, many will get sickened, and sadly families across Ontario will lose children. The province and school boards are taking a tremendous risk bordering on criminal negligence. It is sheer lunacy that we are willing to gamble with the lives of unvaccinated children!

Everyone wants their kids back in school. Who doesn't want to see children thriving, playing, learning in front of a live teacher in a classroom with their peers? No one can deny the importance of socializing with their friends. Yes, remote learning was brutal. Mental health is a concern no doubt. Parents want to go back to normal. How many of us have said that we just can't do this anymore? We love our kids, but we are not all meant to be stuck in the house together all day, every day. Enough!

But how is my mental health going to be for the rest of my life if I send my children to school during the most dangerous phase of the pandemic, and I lose them? How will that impact their brothers and sisters? What will it do to their grandparents? How will my wife and I go on? To put it bluntly, the back-to-school plan is a not a plan at all. It does not inspire any confidence that my two young children will be safe in elementary school. They will not be vaccinated, and they will be vulnerable to becoming infected from a highly contagious Delta variant that is a fundamentally different virus than the original COVID-19.

So, what is the solution? I honestly have no clue. We are trying to figure this out as we go. Parents have limited options. How many of us can afford to stay home and watch our kids? How many of us have family that we can turn to for support?

Yet deep down inside, I know my wife and I cannot be the only ones feeling this uncertain and anxious. We need

to find other parents, teachers and concerned workers and act. We need to demand that schools stay closed until all our children are vaccinated. Why are none of our "leaders" talking about eradicating this virus once and for all? Short-term pain, long-term gain. How can China contain this virus, but we can't in our advanced Western societies? Is it all about money and the stock market? Do our kids need to be sacrificed for the sake of the economy? What kind of world do we live in!

All the talking heads in the media keep telling us our children face little risk—that they need to be in school, that the vast majority will only suffer minor symptoms, that it's important for their mental health, and that Ontario has a safe reopening plan. On the other side, I see kids dying and getting sick. This should not be happening, period! Finally, we have Ontario's chief medical officer saying we need to "normalize" COVID-19 and that schools will not close unless a catastrophic situation arises.

Kids getting sick from COVID in schools should never be normalized. Ever! My wife and I cannot allow our children to be a part of an experiment this fall. Will they suffer academically? Maybe. Will their mental health suffer? Perhaps. But at least we are trying to do whatever it takes to keep them alive and safe until the fourth wave is over.

Like-minded parents, teachers and other workers need to come together and demand that all our kids are vaccinated before we send them back to in-person learning as the bare minimum. We cannot accept anything less. Never mind changing the damn air filters and wearing ineffective cloth masks! In a war you never leave anyone behind on the field of battle. The government and the school boards are leaving all children under 12 behind in the war against COVID. We cannot afford to lose the most precious thing we have. We need to protect our children at all costs. The children are our future. Only we can protect our future.



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