

Shame

To the Premier Doug Ford & the Minister of Education Stephen Lecce, I am absolutely livid regarding your return to school plan for the Province of Ontario.

Ontario students, families and education workers deserve so much better than what you are providing them. To date, not only have you not provided enough funding to offer a safe and confident return to school starting September 8th, but you have also provided minimal guidance to School Boards, Childcare centres, Bussing companies, Before and After School programs, and I am sure the list goes on. And in some cases, you have even pulled the rug right out from under the School Boards, and therefore parents, refusing to approve their return to school plans with less than 3 weeks left before school is to begin. What you have created is chaos - chaos for teachers, for parents, for students, for families, for the citizens of this Province that you are supposed to be looking out for.

A pandemic is not the time to hold the pursestrings tight to your chest. Now is the time to invest in a safe return to school in order to avoid a second economic shut down in this province, not to mention the increased healthcare costs that will also ensue when outbreaks inevitably occur. You continue to fall back on the talking point that 'Ontario has the best return to school plan in the country.' Well, even if that is the case, it doesn't matter - we don't want the best return to school plan in the country - we deserve the best return to school plan possible - full stop! And that is not what you have provided. You have provided a plan that places up to 30+ students together in rooms that the majority of, in my 10 years of teaching experience, are physically incapable of allowing social distancing to occur. You have provided a plan that requires students to continue to sit together on bus rides, even if they are not in the same class at school, increasing their potential exposure. You have provided a plan that unfairly discriminates against working class families - families that have no choice but to send their kids to school or else face financial hardship (if they are not already facing this due to the pandemic or other circumstances).

The people of this province have been pleading with you since the start of August to go back and improve this plan. Over 200 000 people have signed a change.org petition asking you to do the right thing and to properly fund a Safe September. Yet instead of responding to the people's voices, you have turned around and blamed the teacher's unions. You have requested that teacher's be more 'flexible' by giving up their collectively bargained and protected prep time - time that is used not only to mark and prepare future lessons, but time that is used to call parents, check in on students, complete paperwork for administration, photocopy materials, send and reply to emails, and many other tasks. Tasks that any other employee in any other field would be given time to complete during their work day. To assume that teacher's are not already flexible is insulting. The very nature of teaching is to be flexible, to roll with the punches when problems and challenges arise in class, whether it be difficulty with a lesson, with a student, with technology - the list goes on.

In conclusion Premier Ford & Minister Lecce, you have failed Ontarians with this plan. You have put the burden and cost of this pandemic on the backs of families. You continue to state that you have provided 'parents with choice.' But the reality is that the majority of parents do not have a choice. They do not have the luxury to give up a second income and keep their children home. They do not have the extra finances to hire a private tutor. They do not have the time to drive their children to and from school in order to avoid the crowded buses. Shame on you for passing these costs onto the families of Ontario - families that you pledged to help during your campaign - and forcing Ontario families to make impossible decisions about their family and children's well-being.

Shame.

Amy Reinders

Teacher at Centre Dufferin District High School