

July 16, 2020
TCDSB Special Board Meeting

Delegate Statement: Michelle Pellettier

I would like to start with a verse:

And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures,
which are able to make thee wise unto salvation
through faith which is in Christ Jesus.
2 Timothy 3:15

Hello, my name is Michelle Pellettier. I am a parent of a secondary school student entering grade 12 at Loretto Abbey. Myself and my seven siblings and my two children have all attended TCDSB schools from kindergarten through to completion of high school.

I am highly privileged to have the opportunity to speak to you today. We all need to recognize that not all of our students are living in stable, safe, healthy or prosperous homes. Consider those who are living in poverty or abuse, with many living in single-parent households. I am blessed to be able to use my words to affect positive outcomes for our school and faith community.

The reality is that we need to eventually have students return to school; and NOW is the time to prepare for a safe full-time return to school in September.

Consider the enormous ramifications of keeping students out of the classroom. Aside from exacerbating the serious financial stress on families who are unable to return to work, the lack of education and community fellowship are likely to have prolonged negative effects on the mental and physical wellbeing, development and future prospects of our children.

Each and every TCDSB student has been impacted by the unprecedented changes to their education and school life since March of this year.

My daughter is entering grade 12, her final year of secondary school this Fall, and she writes:

"The best scenario is going back to fully learning in class. Being a grade 12 student and entering my final year of high school, I want to make the most of my experiences and time being in a high school hallway, having a locker, eating in the cafeteria, and making memories with friends. Grade 12 also means applying to universities and colleges; students want to have good marks to submit; and achieving these are more successful by being taught the course material in the classroom. Having to complete courses online and juggle so many courses at once while also submitting applications for post-secondary programs would be extremely stressful. I understand the virus is still a major concern and the safety of staff and students is number one priority. If it is not possible to go back to class full-time, we should still try to maximize the time in the

classroom as well as online. It is not effective being fully online; at least not with the system that was in place as last year's school term ended." END

Back in March, closing schools was cautionary and responsive. Today, we have more knowledge and scientific evidence suggesting that young children and teens have a very low risk of becoming seriously ill from the virus; and they appear to rarely contract it or pass it on to those at higher risk – such as parents and teachers. Now, the Province's health infrastructure and case tracing data show sufficient containment and mitigation of the virus among the impacted geographic regions, the most vulnerable and in particular institutions where it has festered.

Schools need to fully prepare to return full-time in September.

This is glaringly obvious in context of Ontario's announcement to open bars and restaurants outside of the GTHA as of tomorrow. The need for school openings is leaps and bounds greater than the need for bars reopening! Other provinces, including Quebec which was a national hot spot, have committed to opening classrooms full-time. Opening schools with appropriate health and safety protocols is far less risky given that they are not public spaces - only students and staff who are accounted for have access to and share school facilities. Toronto Public Health has outlined fulsome recommendations and measures to keep schools safe.

However, if a compromised decision is handed down from the Ministry to return to school with a hybrid model, I would ask the Board to reconsider the initial draft secondary school plan. Maximize the time students are in school. Students should be inclass full days when they are in attendance.

The Board may consider a similar 2/3 day model as per the elementary draft hybrid model. Another option is 2 full weeks inclass followed by 2 full weeks online – this allows for 14-day quarantine periods. The Board may consider dedicating a cohort of teachers for inclass instruction, and another cohort of teachers for online learning. Some courses may be offered online only, with other core courses offered inclass.

The upheaval to student's education and social lives and routines in the past several months has caused concerning and escalating stress. They have been bombarded with fear mongering stories, daily sick and death counts and misinformation from our political and media realms.

This has started to concretize a mindset of fear. It is imperative that we counter this spirit of fear with collective action and faith in order to RESTORE safety, courage and hope for our students.

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear;
but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.
2 Timothy 1:7

Our schools not only deliver necessary education; but also, they are living communities of fellowship and faith. Schools provide consistency, discipline, care and nurturing that our children need for their healthy development, maturation and emotional support. Our children have a right to full-time education. A lack of access to education is neglect.

Let us together transform the world through witness, faith, innovation and action.

I urge you to push for a return to full-time school as your top priority. **Don't give up** until you have the resources and commitment needed from the Ministry for a return to continued full-time public education.

Peace to you all.

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