

My name is Rachel Thomas and I am a parent of a student at St John elementary and teacher at St John Paul II high school.

I want to express my concerns in regard to elementary class sizes, use of supply teachers, and study hall at the high school level.

My first concern is elementary class sizes. My daughter will be in a class of 30 children or more in junior kindergarten. This is highly concerning given that this age group will have the most difficulty physically distancing, wearing masks properly (I am PRO masks for JK, but this will be a concern), and they will need the most physical assistance from their teachers, second only to ISP students. All elementary classes, especially younger students that will struggle with COVID safety protocols, will need to be smaller to ensure safer schools and slow the transmission of COVID. I am asking the TCDSB to investigate using space from under subscribed schools (like MT, which typically has around 400 students enrolled but a capacity for over 1,000 students), or empty schools (like Our Lady of Mount Carmel), to send Grade 7 and 8 students to those locations, in smaller cohorts, leaving room at schools to create smaller class sizes for JK-Grade 6 students.

My second issue is covering teachers when they are sick or need to stay home with their children. This will be happening much more now that teachers and their children cannot go to work/school with any cold symptoms. The Board should investigate having teachers teach their in person class online when they must be home, instead of having students come to class and sit there while a supply supervises them doing work that they could be doing safely at home. Having students report to school for zero live instruction by their teacher and having a supply teacher or another teacher covering the class is irresponsible and increasing the amount of contacts this cohort has. This strategy would reduce the need for supply teachers and internal coverages, freeing money up for smaller class sizes and freeing up supply teachers who would then be available to teach smaller elementary cohorts, not to mention reducing contacts at the secondary level.

My last concern is about the high school schedule, specifically study hall. Bringing students from MANY classes together, in one room, having their masks off while they eat lunch and then having them stay for almost four hours is incredibly risky. At my school study hall will take place in our library, which was too small to safely house our PD, so will be extremely risky for study hall. Study hall is being forced on the TCDSB because we are not having students in for 50% of the day. I ask why we are not having cohort 1A come in the mornings and cohort 1B in the afternoon? This would mean all students would have school each day, which parents would be happy about, but still keeping the cohort using that classroom to 30 kids total, instead of study hall, which could mean well over a 100 contacts per day! Having cohort 1A at school in the morning and 1B at school in the afternoon would also get rid of synchronous learning, freeing up technology demands for staff and students, and would make online instruction more equitable for students that will struggle to be online at a set time (for example, families sharing one computer). The idea that two cohorts of 15 students cannot be in the same classroom, with over an hour of time between classes, but study hall is safe, with over 100 students rotating through is hygiene theatre and putting our school staff and students at risk.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I welcome any questions to clarify or expand on my concerns.