

**DELEGATION TO THE TCDSB TRUSTEES MADE BY GREG SMITH
SPEAKING ON HIS ON BEHALF AS THE PARENT OF CHILDREN
ATTENDING ST. AMBROSE SCHOOL**

Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to address the Board of Trustees. Let me begin by acknowledging the hard work of many people at all levels of the TCDSB that have been preparing for an unprecedented return to school. As a parent watching from the sidelines I know this hasn't been easy for anyone involved and truly appreciate your efforts.

I've spent hours reading the Back to School Plan published by the board and was feeling optimistic about a safe return to school for my children. However, once class sizes for our school were released last week I spoke with several board employees and learned that what is being said in the board's Back to School Plan and reinforced in the board's August 14 motion on class and cohort size isn't being implemented in my local school. In fact, the process for allocating staffing and class sizes hasn't changed from September 2019 to September 2020 for my school.

It was shocking to learn that most, if not all, of the physical distancing measures would not be in place at St. Ambrose. Our children will be returning to classes larger than the ones they left in March - 10% larger in the Junior division. With class sizes of 29 students the school will be running classes 18% larger than the 24.5 funded by the Ministry of Education and 93% of the absolute maximum capacity of 31 students allowed under the collective agreements with the union. Most troubling is that these class sizes are almost double the guideline of 15 students recommended by the medical community in various reports.

The reality today is that in the midst of a pandemic the children at St. Ambrose are sitting in crowded classrooms with desks that are less than 18 inches apart. Imagine for a moment if you were asked at your next board meeting to move your chairs together and conduct your meeting 18 inches apart from fellow staff and trustees. Take that scenario one step further and remove your mask to eat your lunch in that same spot while not speaking to your colleague because you are seated too close together. That is what the TCDSB is expecting my children to do for 300 minutes a day, every day.

The mandate for cohorts of 50 students will be impossible to achieve - with classes of 29 students plus a teacher combining even two classes together into a cohort will exceed this limit. In fact, that is already happening today as there are at least 58 students and 2 teachers currently working in the school gymnasium. I'm struggling

to understand how anyone with can allow this to happen when student safety is the primary objective.

The Back to School Plan includes a commitment to install plexiglass shields for students in classes with more than 15 children. This seems to have been overlooked or forgotten - when speaking with board employees there was uncertainty about when, if ever, they would be installed in our school and nobody could even tell me if they had seen one anywhere in the entire school board.

St. Ambrose has available space, in fact there are empty classrooms that have been locked up and remain dark because of the board's decisions on staffing. I recognize the complexity of Ministry of Education funding formulas and understand that mixed messages from higher orders of government are creating confusion. However, there are steps the board can and should take today to increase the staffing at St. Ambrose and bring our class sizes down to acceptable and safe levels.

Over the longer term, I would like to ask the board to take two critical steps to help make the classroom environment safer for our children

1. Be truthful and transparent

Update the Back to School Plan - The board's Back to School Plan paints an overly optimistic picture of what return to school will look like and creates false reassurances by discussing safety measures that don't exist. It must be updated with a more realistic and factual view of the current conditions in all schools - and use plain language that parents can understand and interpret.

Publish class size data and photographs - Parents should be able to access accurate information about class sizes organized by school and grade across the entire school board so we can see how successful the current plan is at promoting physical distancing. These numbers should be accompanied by photographs of every TDCSB classroom showing the layout and spacing with and without children in the class. This information will help parents understand the conditions inside of classrooms we aren't able to access currently.

Allow parents to advocate for TCDSB's needs - Sharing information with parents candidly will allow us to be vocal and challenge the decisions made by higher orders of government with facts that can't be refuted. Parents have a vested interest in the board's success and we can be your allies in making changes for the better - but we need you to equip us for the task.

2. Be flexible and resourceful

More teachers in more classrooms- We need more teachers teaching in classrooms today to make class sizes smaller and create a safe environment for our children - we can't wait for the higher orders of government to solve this problem for us. There are a large number of qualified teachers working in administrative and consulting roles in the board office today. These resources must be redeployed to teaching positions to help reduce class sizes and increase staffing flexibility without additional funding in the short term.

There are a wide range of options to make this happen - job sharing is a viable option for staffing remote learning classrooms where teachers in administrative and consulting roles can split their time between teaching and non-teaching duties to making each one the equivalent to a 0.5 teacher while still having time in the day to complete mission critical board duties.

These steps are easier said than done - but we have a shining example of how to make it happen with the City of Toronto who deployed approximately 2000 unionized and non-unioned employees from City Hall to front line jobs in high needs areas like homeless shelters, long term care homes and other front line services. The articles below share some of the success stories from these initiatives.

[1,900 city staff set to be re-deployed to COVID-19 response, or put on leave](#)

[City IT manager settles into new job: cleaning Toronto's largest long-term-care home](#)

[City redeploys hundreds of employees to shelter system during COVID-19 emergency](#)

Extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures, there is a very short window of time to take bold action and do what is right for our children, before the health impacts of the current conditions push us beyond the point of no return.

Thank you for your time and attention to this critical matter, I welcome phone calls and emails from any member of the board or TCDSB staff that would like to speak about making our schools safer for the children.