

## Toronto Catholic School Board Delegation

### St. Clement CSPC

December 10, 2020

#### Opening:

On behalf of our parent community at St. Clement, we want to share with you concerns that have been raised over the approach to staffing of the in-classroom and virtual learning options for this school year.

St. Clement has lost so far a total of 4 in-person classroom teachers to online learning and experienced a reorganization effective November 23<sup>rd</sup>. Given that there additional opportunities for parents to opt in or out of in-classroom or online learning options this year, we are gravely concerned that the health and safety conditions for in-class learning at our school will worsen with further changes.

#### Main Point and Supporting Details:

In this exceptional year, during which space considerations and student mental health have received a new emphasis in our schools, we are finding that the measures the Board has been taking to accommodate online learning have worsened overcrowding and mental health pressures on our in-person students.

Using pre-COVID ratios as a baseline for staffing schools who have not been assigned a Q5 designation poses a concern that “low risk” schools will be exposed to higher risks and the implications associated with these decisions.

At St. Clement school, following the staffing changes to in-person learning, we now have all classes (with the exception of kindergarten) at or above pre-COVID classroom sizes.

This is an unacceptable situation during a year in which the government has made commitments to reduce classroom sizes and target cohorts of 15. Any gains that could have been made due to transfer of in-class students to virtual learning have been cancelled by the removal of in-person teachers. While understandably, Q5 schools should receive careful consideration, it should not be at the expense of students at other schools. Funding should be distributed such that staffing levels and staffing models at ALL schools should at minimum be preserved or improved upon from pre-COVID levels.

1. To go into the space considerations in more detail - St. Clement classrooms were not designed for social distancing considerations. When using pre-COVID student/teacher ratios, many classroom spaces simply do not allow for public health social distancing requirements. Our school currently has one class in the gym partitioned from the other section of the gym and one class in the library. After the recent reorganization, we have heard from parents in the Junior and Intermediate grades that their children’s body size has not been taken into consideration when calculating the space required for having 28 or 29 large-sized children plus the teacher in a small classroom with little room to move or distance. We have heard from teachers in the

Primary grades about the safety hazard of tripping over bins covering the floors because students are no longer allowed to use wall hooks to store their belongings.

2. And now for a few words about mental health - I'm sure we would all agree that children have endured significant mental health challenges with the pandemic and lockdowns of the past 9 months. As we try to provide stability and support to our students, changes mid-school year pose further strain on children who are required to adjust to a new cohort or a new teacher or both. Mixing cohorts mid-cycle is also disruptive to the teacher and creates additional health and safety exposures. In the last reorganization, we had more than 10% of our student population who had to adjust to a change in teacher or cohort. Let's not underestimate this vital aspect of mental health as the Board makes decisions throughout this unprecedented year.

**Summary:**

To conclude - While we appreciate budget and teacher limitations, we have concerns about negatively impacting one aspect to support another. The Board's decision to provide more than one opportunity to switch learning pathways throughout the year is a costly one and must be resourced appropriately. We ask that you consider the factors of physical space, social distancing, and mental health with any subsequent plans. We thank you for your time today.

**Question : What are the current class sizes at St. Clement?**

**Answer :** Kindergarten classes are on average 23 students. Primary classes have stayed the same at 19 and up, while Junior classes have gone from mid-20s to 27 and up, and Intermediate has stayed the same at 27 and up.

**Question : What else could the board do to provide stability to students?**

**Answer :** Students and parents may benefit from clear communication of how remote learning would be delivered in the event of a complete school shutdown. Now that the Board has the experience from spring of last school year and the online learning currently being delivered, in-class students, parents and teachers would surely appreciate robust communication of how a potential school closure transition would be managed.