

Appendix A

Analysis of the Hybrid/Alternate/Adaptive Model

This information is anecdotal, based upon ideas and concerns shared by families of the Halton District School Board, and observations by its Trustees.

Educational Systems are Childcare Systems

Education is a Human Right. Citizens/taxpayers enter into a social contract with the government for the provision of equitable education for all. In the early years of schooling, the educational system also takes on the role of childcare provider. This obligation can not suddenly vanish without resulting in consequences to parents, their children, the labour force and the economy.

Lack of Childcare Options

The established childcare system is primarily based on care for preschool aged children. There is no care system available during regular working hours for school aged children. Daycares are currently also required to function with limited capacity. Children from kindergarten (K) to grade 6 need to have adult supervision from a childcare perspective. Our board alone has over 36,000 K-6 students, a large portion of which will need out-of-home care during the day in the hybrid model in order for their parents to fulfill their employment obligations. We also have a robust coterminous board and French schools within our region which may add another 10,000 to 15,000 students requiring childcare. That is approximately 50,000 students in Halton alone. Where are all these childcare providers going to come from?

A market of previously employed people from various sectors may come forward seeing an opportunity to make some income and take in a number of students into care during the day within their neighbourhoods. These people will have no training in childcare, not to mention the requirement to adhere to public health protocols or training on such protocols to keep virus transmission at bay. There is no certification, accountability or transparency for pop-up childcare. These casual neighbourhood arrangements could potentially put children in unsafe environments as well as exponentially increase the risk of transmitting the virus and spreading it back to their schools.

Childcare costs money. Adding new childcare costs for families (many with multiple children) could be an unexpected and critical financial burden. Parents may opt to have one parent shoulder the childcare responsibilities versus returning to work. It is not lost on this Board of Trustees, composed entirely of women, that much of the labour force losses and burdens of the hybrid system will disadvantage women. Single mothers may have to make unbearable, life-altering choices. We may find desperate parents who could not secure or afford childcare leaving the workforce or leaving their young children alone at home.

Hybrid Model Opens Additional Risk to Multiple Schools and Systems

In an urban setting, children that attend daycares mix with students from other classes, other schools and other systems (English Public, English Catholic, French Public, French Catholic). This happens whether parents use formal organizations/businesses or casual, in-home unlicensed care. By removing full-day, every day schooling where there is a dedicated and controlled “bubble” within which the virus could be more easily identified and contained within one school, the government is opening up the student bubble exponentially through the necessity of casual and out-of-the-home care and putting multiple classes, schools and boards at risk.

Hybrid Model is at Odds with Expert Healthcare Advice from SickKids Hospital

SickKids Hospital is an internationally respected healthcare organization that is focused on children. It has released [a report](#) with many recommendations for schools including the model that it views as best for the health and well-being of school-aged children, which is a full-time, in-person model.

Instruction on Out-of-school Days

The vision this government has about the hybrid/alternate model is that on the days that students are not in school, they will be handily working at home on assignments, logging in to synchronous lessons and isolating themselves from other students. If children need to be cared for outside the home, none of this will happen. The government has stated that curriculum expectations will remain intact, but the reality is that these expectations will have to be met over half the previously allocated time. Even if parents are home, they are not trained to be teachers and many will have employment obligations that pull them away from focusing on facilitating their children’s educational objectives during the day. Parents have said over and over again that the March through June period that relied on parental teaching was a struggle and unsuccessful on many levels. Teachers will not be available for students’ out-of-school days as they will be responsible for teaching the alternate cohort. This increases stress throughout the system.

Inequities of the Hybrid Model

Wealthy families who can afford to bring care to their home (nannies/tutors) or currently function within a two-parent-one-income environment may fare reasonably well in a hybrid system with clear expectations and strong teacher support. They may also choose to exit the public system for the private one as private schools can open full-time. Most families do not fall under this category. There will be inequities of access to lessons, to devices and to safe environments for students, and a steady increase in the inequity gap that already exists. This will disproportionately impact racialized, indigenous, socioeconomically disadvantaged families and students with special needs.

Solutions

Funding Smaller Cohorts Appropriately

If the government favours a 15-student cohort, the safest model would also insist on every-day in-person instruction by teachers to preserve the safe student bubbles to avoid spreading the virus. This would necessitate an infusion of appropriate funding to allow the hiring of teachers and acquiring space (community centres, public libraries, empty commercial space, faith spaces, etc.), as well as accounting for increasing transportation and cleaning costs. Slight adjustments to the cohort size would make this easier. Maintaining the Primary class size cap of 20 as the cohort size would allow primary students to attend daily without space issues. This could be extended to the Junior grades.

Being Creative with Education Models

The insistence that all worthy education can only happen within four walls holds our education system back from evolving and being innovative. As outdoor environments have been shown to be lower risk for virus spread than indoor environments, part-time in-school learning could be balanced with outdoor education opportunities from grades 1-8. Kindergarten's play-based program could be adapted to the Forest Schools model that already exists in Scandinavian countries, the UK, Germany, the US and right here in Ontario. Our province, especially in the southern portions, has good weather from May through the end of November. We have provincial parks, conservation areas, municipal parks and even school fields that often sit near vacant during instructional hours.

Resource link within the document:

<http://www.sickkids.ca/PDFs/About-SickKids/81407-COVID19-Recommendations-for-School-Reopening-SickKids.pdf>