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Stop the bashing

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Ok folks ? I'm actually getting pretty tired of all the teacher bashing I'm hearing. I have heard a sudden increase in the amount of complaints about how teachers who are reluctant to go back to class are just a bunch of whiners. Much of this seems to be coming from parents who have forgotten what it was like to teach their own kids for 2 or 3 hours per day and what a nightmare THAT was. Remember day drinking? That was you and you were dealing with your own kids! Now you're complaining because teachers don't feel safe at work? Guess what, neither would you if you were stuck in a room with 25-30 kids not wearing masks properly, dropping them on the floor, sneezing, coughing, forgetting to wash their hands or straight up picking their noses ? all the while possibly harbouring a virus that is a known killer. C'mon?give teachers a break. Talk about working on the front lines! Let me ask you one simple question ? would you do it?

I'm also tired of folks comparing teaching to nursing and not in a favourable way. The implication is nurses don't complain and they deal with sick folks all day long and thank goodness they do. I have good friends that are teachers and others that are nurses, so I'll probably offend them both equally with this article but again, enough comparing. Both are tough jobs in different ways. Nurses signed up for a career of facing sick people. I'm worried sick that my own daughter is on track to become a nurse. Here we are trying hard to protect her from COVID-19 and in three short years, with a degree under her belt, she could be on the front lines face to face with it. But at least we know she will have the proper training and the proper equipment, hospital grade ventilation systems and supportive team members around her. What do teachers have? The promise of PPE and enhanced sanitizing along with ?improved ventilation?, possibly a public health nurse who might get to their school once or twice per semester and virtually no social distancing. Teachers didn't sign up for this level of risk just like grocery workers didn't. At least many grocery workers get to work behind plexiglas with masks, face shields, gloves, limits on the number of people in their store and strictly enforced social distancing. A grocery store is about a bazillion times bigger than a classroom, the ventilation systems are likely more modern and some grocery staff even received a slight top up in pay, at least for a little while. Teachers on the other hand will now be expected to discern between a sniffle, an allergy, kids with stomach flu or COVID-19. All while face to face with them in an enclosed classroom.

I'm also annoyed at people who moan and complain about all of this without knowing all the facts. Do you know how school funding formulas work? Do you know that while the government says it's handing money out like ice cream on a hot day, there are actually some pretty tight restrictions on how and where you can enjoy that ice cream? Just because 13 of 27 kids elected to do online learning in your child's grade 4 class, doesn't necessarily mean the other 14 kids are nicely distributed all around a socially distanced classroom. Nope ? it's entirely possible that class will be collapsed and combined with another ?small? class, and there goes all your social distancing. Teachers, as I may or may not have stated last week, are days away from school starting and many still don't know what grade or subject they are teaching. One local high school even put out a tweet stating: (I'm paraphrasing but not by much) ?Yeah we thought we'd be ready but we're not ready so school start is delayed again?? This school opening ?plan? is a disaster waiting to happen and none of it is the fault of teachers.

It is my opinion that much of what is driving school re-opening plans has to do with both the economy and with children's mental health. Without a doubt there are families struggling, daycare is costly and some just can't work from home and need their children to return to school. This speaks to larger problems of systemic poverty, low wage jobs that are undervalued and underpaid and a chronic lack of funding for adequate and accessible day care that has existed for many, many years. In turn, women are disproportionately paying the price during this pandemic, having to make difficult choices about prioritizing work and children. At the same time, classroom teachers are being advised to limit the amount of educational materials in the classroom and that toys, once played with go into a bucket for sanitization not to be touched again for 72 hours. Children won't be re-connecting with friends, even at recess, because, in most cases, the class will be the cohort so you'd better hope your child likes his/her classmates. Lunch is in the classroom and even recess will involve strict supervision and social distancing. I'm not disputing the necessity of these actions but I'm equally not sure this will help any child with their mental health. Nor do I think re-opening schools, only to shut them down in a few weeks time if cases rise, will make things any better. There is a good chance it will only add to their confusion and angst as new

routines are disrupted yet again. None of this has anything to do with teachers who are doing their level best to make an untenable situation work. Teachers will play an enormous role in how successful children are at the transitions expected of them in the coming weeks. They are about to hit the front lines and for any hope of school re-opening to work, we must adopt the attitude that we are all in this together. Let's stop the teacher bashing.