

Come out, come out wherever you are

by SHERALYN ROMAN

To everyone's great relief the election is now over and while surely the pundits will ponder its impact, I think it's fair to say we all need a little break before the debrief. After all, there is much else to discuss unrelated to the recent federal election ? specifically, what is happening in classrooms, staffrooms and schools across the province of Ontario. Presumably the federal Conservative powers that be have given Mr. Ford the green light to end his recent period of enforced isolation and yet, as of press time, we've still heard nothing from him. This prompts me to shout, from the rooftops, 'come out come out wherever you are'...? because Mr. Ford, it's time we talked about the looming possibility of a teachers strike, classroom size, e-learning and more.

Those of you that know me may have been wondering why I've been strangely silent on the education issue. Like you, I too was distracted by the federal election shenanigans and perhaps lulled in to a false sense of security when CUPE recently reached an agreement working together with Mr. Lecce (seemingly the ONLY member of provincial parliament who has actually been at work these past few months.) After experiencing a recent parent / teacher interview night however, and with the election now behind us, I suggest it's high time Mr. Ford pops his head out from the fox hole he's been hunkered down in after spending the spring and early summer lobbing grenades (disguised as drastic funding cuts) at our education system.

As a parent, a former educator, a Parent Advisory Council Member, and someone who ran for the position of School Trustee, I believe I have solid, working first hand knowledge of just how hard 99% of our teachers work. They are worth every penny and then some. Who among you would deny that after 8 weeks at home each summer you aren't ready to throw your kids in the classroom, bolt the door from the outside and run away as far and as fast as you can from the little terrors. Yet we expect teachers, the very same we complain about, to manage 30 or more of those kids, day in and day out, for about 180 days a year, teaching them everything from toileting to trigonometry. (Sure they're supposed to be toilet trained on school entry but ask ANY teacher how many kids actually are.) Now, Mr. Ford is asking those same teachers to do it all with WAY MORE kids in the classroom, WAY LESS funding and by forcing those of secondary school age to teach themselves at least one online course per year! All while he rewards provincial bureaucrats with a significant pay raise, to the tune of 14%, plus in some cases, a performance bonus! Meanwhile teachers ? guardians of the future ? are being asked to 'understand' why a 1% cost of living 'raise' is all that's on the table. That old expression 'adding insult to injury' comes to mind. It is galling, disingenuous and vexatious and what's even more problematic? With all these Ford cuts ? there's an even greater likelihood that future generations won't even be able to read or understand that last sentence because Gr. 12 English was cut from the curriculum! That pay raise for bureaucrats by the way? It's retroactive and will take the average deputy minister salary from \$205,000 to \$234,080!!! (Considering their recent four-month long 'vacation,' I think this works out to a salary of about \$28,000+ per month over 8 months.) Someone remind me, what's the poverty line again?

I've met teachers who have over 100 high school students spread out over just three classes. That's 100 papers to grade, not easy when it's a math test with standardized answers and virtually impossible when that's 100 essays requiring careful, thoughtful consideration. That's a lot of papers to grade over evenings and weekends. Students in grade 12, where every mark matters and who might need extra help, are lining up down the hallways for even a few precious moments of time ? time that's coming from an educators lunch 'break,' or after school or even for some, online in the evenings. Administrators are dealing with increasingly more complex issues in schools today: from discipline to drugs, to mental health and social welfare issues. Schools need help Mr. Ford, not cuts ? 'come out come out wherever you are'?? it's time to make things right. It's time to fix the mess you've made and to stop using Mr. Lecce, the federal election or whatever other excuse you can think of as a shield from behind which you lob, duck and cover. Our students deserve better. Our teachers deserve better. Our province deserves better.