

Guess how much I love you

by SHERALYN ROMAN

This one is for all my teacher peeps, an unabashedly biased column and one that I believe, many stressed out parents might, at this moment in time, completely agree with! It's been awhile since we talked about hard news (other than CoVid19) like teacher strikes and the impact of strike action on our children's ability to finish the school year. It's also been awhile since we worried about whether or not the course our child might need to graduate was even available for them to enrol in. If only those were our 'only' issues right now! Instead, we are worried about whether the school year will even resume (we now know according to Mr. Lecce that it won't be until at least May 4th) and I'm guessing after just a week or two of 'homeschooling' our kids, we all feel the same way. Teachers 'take ALL the money! It's yours, you deserve it and I really hope you have a good mental health benefit plan too! In case this requires further clarification 'teaching is bloody hard work!

For anyone not familiar with Sam McBratney's book *Guess How Much I Love You*, it's the story of Big Nutbrown Hare and Little Nutbrown Hare 'trying to find a way to measure the unmeasurable,' a declaration of just how much a parent loves their child. It probably doesn't receive as much credit as it should for the common expression 'I love you to the moon and back!' I think it's safe to say that parents who are currently struggling to maintain some sense of normalcy in their kid's lives, while also balancing working from home, the desperate need for groceries AND homeschooling the kids, are also trying to find a way to measure the unmeasurable. That is, just how much we owe to teachers for voluntarily entering a war zone each day, locking themselves in a classroom with 20 to 30+ children or young adults, and attempting to teach them the kinds of skills that will help shape their future as responsible young adults. Most parents I know have only spent a week 'teaching' their kids and they're ready to throw in the towel.

There are significant challenges ahead. Recent statements by Mr. Lecce acknowledge the difficulties the province is faced with in terms of meeting the needs of all students. The government's aim, he says, is to work together 'in partnership with school boards and educators' to ensure every child 'irrespective of ability, geography or socio-economic circumstance' can learn safely while at home. It's a significant challenge. How do we help the special needs child who requires the support of specialized staff to support their learning? How do we ensure every student has access to the tools and resources they need to learn 'like computers, tablets and access to WIFI? Current government estimates put the number of children without access at over 100,000. How do we support students who live in a home where English is the second (or maybe even third) language spoken and homework help might not readily be available? While Tuesday's announcement by Mr. Lecce acknowledged that the government and Boards of Education are working hard to bridge these gaps and are delivering technology (or even printed materials) to those who need it, it's important to note these are the same issues that teachers face EVERY SINGLE DAY in the classroom. Teachers are modifying the learning environment to ensure that every student's needs are met to the best of their ability and they do it willingly, they do it with love and they do it for almost 200+ days a year! Now, as parents, we are being asked to do it for nowhere near that long and only for our own kids - the ones we allegedly love 'to the moon and back.'

I won't lie. I began this column with thoughts of taking a satirical look at homeschooling while also thanking teachers for all they do. But I quickly realized there's really nothing funny about what is going on right now and nothing funny about what the average teacher does day in and day out, every day. I'm grateful that these same teachers stood up in defence of their classrooms to ensure that students continue to receive what they need to be successful. I'm also pretty sure that if we are all being honest, now that we've homeschooled our own kids for a week or two, we'll agree teachers deserve our praise, support, thanks and ALL the money! I was very pleased to hear both Mr. Ford and Mr. Lecce, in their Tuesday announcement, acknowledge that teachers are going above and beyond to keep students learning and 'to create predictability and a sense of stability.' It's nice to hear praise where praise is due. On that note, I'll end with this: Teachers, 'guess how much I love you?' Replied all parents everywhere, 'to the moon AND back.'

*Let's not forget while we are thanking teachers that we also owe enormous gratitude to our Doctors, Nurses, Health Care Workers, Paramedics, Firefighters, Support Staff and everyone involved in helping us battle CoVid19. As well, we might point out, there's a

pretty good chance it may have been a teacher who first instilled their love of learning (or helped them through that difficult science or math class) so they could go on to assume these invaluable roles!