

I have questions AND a few concerns, too

by SHERALYN ROMAN

It's often around this time of year that both parents and kids alike start to get a little stir crazy.

It's pretty darn hot outside, maybe you've exhausted your list (and your budget) of fun things to do and if you hear the words 'I'm bored' one more time, that last nerve you are currently functioning on might just snap all together. In other words, you're desperate to get the kids back to school! But I have questions AND a few concerns too.

First up is this: I'm wondering, if everyone is so sick and tired of their kids and they're your own flesh and blood, why the heck are so many people so hard on teachers? These are the folks you are willingly sending your kids back to, with an expectation that teachers will watch over them for eight hours a day, five days a week, for the foreseeable future. If you trust teachers with your kids teachers can't be all that bad ? can they?

It's no secret that I believe teachers to be (generally) an extremely hard working, kind, caring and truly committed group of individuals who willingly attended six years of post-secondary school so they could join the teaching profession. I'm pretty certain someone this committed chose to do this because ? get this ? they actually love kids! After all, if you didn't, why on earth would you sign up for a job where the public vilifies you, politicians purposely make you the enemy, and your job consists of assuming responsibility for the future of one of four age groups: Kindergarten, a veritable germ pit, or Primary, where most kids love you but some still haven't mastered toileting yet. Then there's Junior ? do these kids have any idea how LOUD they actually are? Finally, there's a special place for Intermediate teachers, I mean c'mon! All those attitudes! All those hormones! All that Axe cologne! I'm betting teachers in Grades 7-8 were the only ones who really had no problem with the mask mandates!

All of this I provide as background for when I ask the question; why are we so hard on teachers? Why do we say dumb things like, 'Well at least they have the summer off??' So what! For ten months of the year they are locked in a classroom with YOUR kid, who drives you nuts on occasion (plus anywhere from 24-30 others) all while trying to teach math, social skills, reading, geography, common decency and good behaviour, science, music, gym and so much more. Three times a day they are on outside duty, including in the middle of a -20 degree snowstorm or a plus-30 degree heat wave. Lesson planning and marking happen after hours because if you think 20 minutes of 'planning time' during the school day is enough time to get all that done, you've never spent 20 minutes simply trying to decipher little Johnny's printing.

I'm concerned. I have been concerned since day one of the pandemic for the health and welfare of our teachers AND our students in the classroom. I believe responses were insufficient, still are, and that our children and teachers are at risk in this 'COVID is over' scenario we're all buying into.

For three years teachers rose to every challenge from entering schools with masks, being denied the chance to wear masks, being provided with 'baggy blue' masks and forbidden from wearing N95s, to dropping everything and teaching online or in some kind of crazy hybrid experiment. Were they perfect? Nope. Were you perfect during the pandemic? Nope. Now we're asking everyone to go back again, into classrooms with a 'mask optional' policy and to do so without causing any 'further disruption' to children's school year by working to rule or striking for better than a 1% raise ? never mind the rate of inflation or the fact that Mr. Lecce seems to think it's ok to mandate teachers facilitate voluntary after school activities. For the record Mr. Lecce, I believe that's called an 'oxymoron,' something I would have assumed you learned at your fancy private school. This is yet another example of Bill 124 suppressing the wages of a primarily female identifying profession that will also impact children, a theme I touched on last week.

Another concern I have is in the lead up to the start of the school year, Mr. Lecce has made much of the fact that he doesn't want to 'negotiate in the media' as he negotiates in the media. Parents, you are being played. He is stirring up disinformation and anger as a decoy away from the government's lack of willingness to deal fairly with all school staff including teachers, throughout the upcoming bargaining season. Are you aware, for example that most teachers do NOT in fact make over \$100,000 a year? Did you

know that an ERW or Education Assistant ? the individuals who work with behavioural students, children with special needs, and children who require additional supports ? earn the least of all? These are the folks who work literally side by side with their students, sometimes at risk of injury from an outburst and their union is currently asking for an increase that some might think is too much. Some may also simply think that ?all these teachers? are just being greedy ? lumping everyone into the same category when in fact ERW's and EA's are significantly underpaid as compared to a full time teacher. I believe the government wants this disparity in understanding to remain because it's to their benefit to have the public angry at anyone working in the education system rather than angry at the government.

I could go on but I probably shouldn't! Perhaps you've already stopped reading but if you haven't I'll leave one last concern on the table for your consideration: it's a four letter word, many think it's a nasty word, perhaps even worse than the one starting with an ?F.? It's ?MASK.? Leaving students, teachers and parents to navigate the murky mask mandate is simply not right. Peer pressure, bullying or teasing will see the child wearing a mask victimized by the many who won't. Teachers will be at risk in non-COVID friendly classrooms (many of which still have no air filtration system) without a mask and that means we are ALL still at risk. COVID is not just a cold for some people and clearly we are NOT building up herd immunity. The numbers will go up in late September or early October. Sigh?.maybe that's when contract negotiations should actually take place with everyone off sick anyway!