

Numbers, words and inconsistencies



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By Nate Smelle

As of Tuesday, Sept. 22 Johns Hopkins University had documented more than 31.3-million confirmed cases of COVID-19 worldwide. To-date, some 966,000 people have lost their lives to the virus since it began putting its foot down around the globe last winter. In Ontario the average daily number of confirmed cases is again climbing above 400.

On March 12 when the Ford government announced that all publicly-funded schools in the province would remain closed for an additional two weeks after the March break there was a total of 59 cases in Ontario. Now, only a little more than six months later, there have been nearly 48,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in our home province.

On Monday, Sept. 21 ? less than two weeks after reopening ? Ontario had recorded 90 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in schools throughout the province. While 75 schools in Ontario are now reporting cases of the virus, only one ? Fellowes High School in Pembroke - has decided to close. As the number of confirmed cases province-wide continues to surge, fear that the second wave of the pandemic could enter the schools and endanger the health and lives of students, staff, parent/guardians and the public is also on the rise.

Since telling Ontarians on May 19 that ?The safety of our children is my top priority and one thing I will never do is take unnecessary risks when it comes to our children,? Premier Doug Ford seems to have changed his tune. Although SickKids Hospital has indicated that class sizes should be capped at 15 students, according to the elementary and secondary school teachers and education workers on the front-lines it is not uncommon to see some 30 students crammed into a single classroom.

Likewise, school bus drivers throughout the province have also raised concerns for the students they transport and themselves, informing the government that in many cases they are being forced to pack their buses with up to 70 students.

When the government has tightened restrictions on the public to the point where only 10 people are allowed to gather at a time, why is it deemed acceptable to place 70 students in a school bus, or 30 students in a classroom at the same time? Since schools are publicly-funded spaces should they not be subject to the same measures in place to prevent people from spreading COVID-19 throughout the community?

What has changed aside from the tens of thousands of more cases of the coronavirus to appear in Ontario since last March that has

made the Premier lighten his stance when it comes to protecting Ontario's children, teachers and education workers?

Surely we know more about how to slow the spread of the virus now than we did six months ago. However, from the rising number of cases throughout the province and worldwide we do not know how to stop it. Until we do, I would suggest our government in Ontario, and all governments around the world for that matter, adopt a 'better safe than sorry' strategy heading into the second wave. Especially when it comes to protecting our children and elders.