

INTO THE UNKNOWN OF THE COVID-19 SCHOOL SYSTEM

FAMILIES NEED SUPPORT FROM THEIR VILLAGE NOW MORE THAN EVER, WRITES MELANIE HENNESSEY



MELANIE HENNESSEY
Column

They say parenting is the easiest thing in the world to have an opinion about, but the hardest thing to do.

And I'm sure all local parents and guardians can agree, parenting during a pandemic takes the challenges that come with childrearing to a whole new level.

In addition to working at home with the kids in tow, Halton parents recently had to make the difficult decision to either send their children back into the classroom this fall or opt for virtual distance learning. Some have even completely switched gears and plan to become their children's teachers via homeschooling.

No matter what choice we made, I think it's safe to say our emotions are all running a similar gamut.

Some of us are nervous. Others are scared.

We feel uncertain.

We second-guess the option we chose.

We lay awake at night, worrying.

We imagine what the school day will look like for our children, armed with their masks and

hand sanitizers, being greeted by teachers decked out in personal protective equipment.

We wonder if we have what it takes to guide our children through distance learning or homeschooling.

We put on a brave face and work hard to psych our kids up for the school year ahead.

As we embark into the unknown, there's one thing that all parents should be able to agree on — that we want what's best for our children. And the best decision for each family's unique needs will look different.

But that doesn't mean we can't still support each other.

At a time when tensions are running high, it's easy to be defensive and divisive or adopt an "us versus them" mentality. Just look at the mask issue alone.

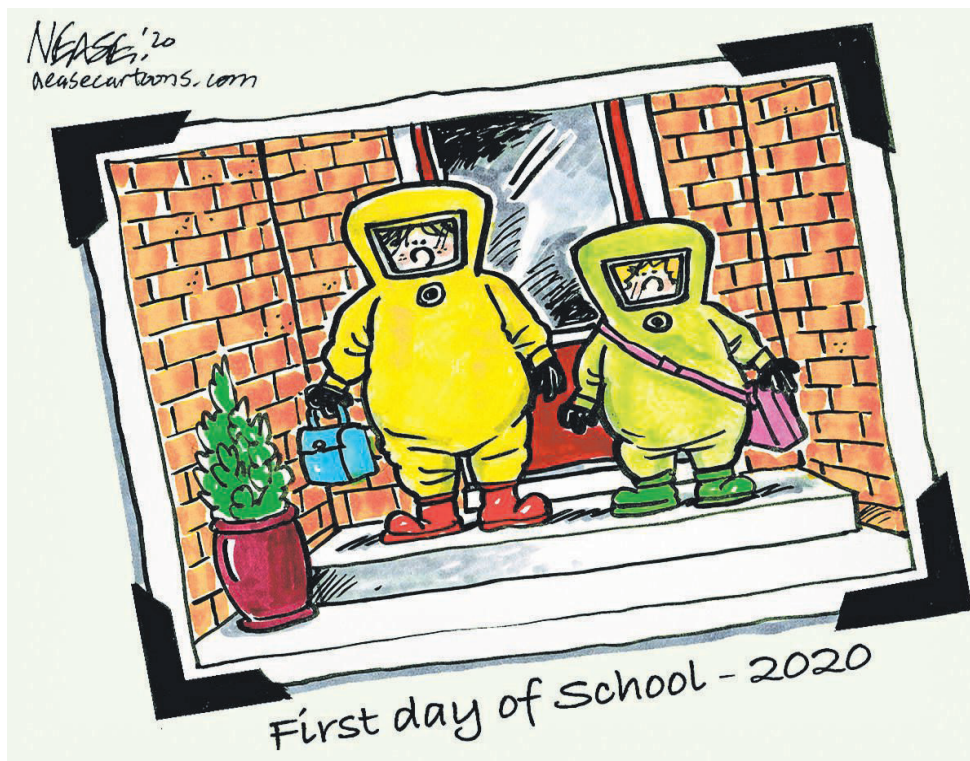
Whether we're sending our kids back to school, taking part in distance learning or switching over to full homeschooling, we can still cheer our friends and neighbours on.

At the very least, let's not question each other's decisions.

Parenting during a pandemic is hard enough. Let's make it just a bit easier by lifting each other up during these unprecedented times.

If we're going to get through this, we need our village, now more than ever.

Melanie Hennessey is a reporter with insidehalton.com and theifp.ca. She can be reached at mhennessy@metroland.com.



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BE PREPARED, AND FLEXIBLE

RESILIENCY AND ADAPTABILITY WILL BE THE GREATEST LESSONS WE LEARN THIS SCHOOL YEAR, WRITES DR. NADIA ALAM



DR. NADIA ALAM
Column

"What are you doing with your kids for school?" It's a common question these days.

Nobody really knows the best way to re-open schools. We are comfortable with in-person teaching. Virtual teaching is a whole new skill set. We know some of what's worked — co-horting, mandatory masks, hand hygiene, social distancing, daily at-home screening, isolating the symptomatic, contact tracing and so on.

We know what definitely doesn't work — throwing open school doors and pretending the pandemic doesn't exist. We have many, many options.

What remains uncertain is the day-to-day real-

ity of back-to-school 2020. Uncertainty at best creates frustration and at worst, fear and anxiety.

And, much of our productivity — much of our sense of control — relies on predictable schedules.

COVID-19 is a new disease entity. We learn more every single day. So, recommendations change day to day.

We have just a few days until school starts. Despite the growing urgency, the advice I give is this: Take a breath. Be patient. School boards will wrestle with how to educate the two million students across Ontario. Meanwhile parents should talk to their kids. Think about local contexts, home situations, health considerations and then decide whether virtual or in-person schooling is your best bet.

Teachers could consider how they will adapt lesson

plans and workflows. We will not be able to complete our usual projects — so prioritize what you want students to get out of this year.

Outbreaks will happen. The number of active cases will rise. We will likely see a second wave of infections. So prepare. Be flexible. Stay calm.

And most of all, be kind. More than math, science or grammar, 2020 is the year we will learn resilience and adaptability. Be the example you want to see in your kids and in the world.

Nadia Alam is a Halton physician and past president of the Ontario Medical Association. Her columns also appear on www.drnadialam.com. She can be reached through her website.

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