

EDUCATING THE COVID KID

PANDEMIC REVEALED LONG-STANDING INEQUITIES, CHALLENGED US TO REINVENT LEARNING: JEZ



MARTHA JEZ
Column



In March 2020, students across Ontario felt a sense of anticipation: they were told school was going to shut down for two weeks while we "flattened the curve." It

was the same excitement they felt from getting a snow day — having bonus time off from assignments, homework, gym class, bus rides, early morning practice, cold

recesses and packed lunches. No one could have predicted the tremendous losses they were about to experience, or how this would shape their identities as students.

As we enter the third year of learning during a pandemic, we're still only realizing the full impact of these losses while also understanding the call to reimagine the roles schools play in the lives of our children.

There are kindergarten students who have never sat for circle time, visited a public library or brought in a stuffed animal for show and share. There are primary students who don't know how to hold a pencil, what an office is or where to find the gym. There are high school students who relied on screen learning without a camera or microphone turned on and just two letters — their initials — displayed on screen to mark their presence. And there's the engagement counsellors trying to reach children who have powered off and simply

not returned.

Schools are the cornerstone of our communities. Each time they open their doors after a shutdown, teachers are greeting changed students. There are fights in playgrounds fueled by anger and anxiety, loss of social graces, nutrition and athletic ability. There are children who are disengaged, frustrated and sad.

COVID kids who have thrived have had strong parental support and/or highly skilled teachers with a strong understanding of technology and how to use it to engage and inspire. Many kids who weren't succeeding in a traditional school environment have done well, as have those who are self-motivated, resilient, curious and have engaged in informal learning communities, like online gaming and esports networks.

The pandemic has devastated families and communities. It has also revealed longstanding inequities and challenged us to reinvent learning. The big questions

before us are, how must school transform to help the COVID kid? Support the COVID educator? Rebuild a sense of community? Serve everyone more equitably and effectively?

As we "build back better," we need to recognize, support and celebrate the role our schools, educators, caretakers, librarians, office staff, bus drivers, cross walkers and coaches play in ensuring that our children are nurtured, cared for, academically challenged, engaged and happy. Without their efforts, none of this work is possible.

Martha Jez is CEO of a Canadian-based education company, Fair Chance Learning, committed to elevating opportunities and learning experiences for all. Jez, a mom to four young learners, is passionate about knowledge mobilization and creating networks and conversations between innovators and educators across Canada.

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Q

I am separated. We have a teenage child. Can the child decide where she/he will reside?

A

This is a common question. As a general rule, it is said that children do not make decisions about parenting issues. However, as children get older, their views and preferences become more important and compelling when addressing these issues. There are a few ways to determine a child's views and preferences, for instance: 1) There can be a views and preferences investigation, conducted usually by a family counsellor or therapist or family lawyer experienced with such investigations; 2) There can be a formal assessment done usually by a psychologist or family counsellor or therapist; or 3) The parents can also ask the court to make an order asking the Office of the Children's Lawyer ("OCL") to become involved. If the OCL becomes involved, then it will appoint either a lawyer, a social worker, or both. We do a lot of family/divorce law, with offices in Georgetown, Brampton and Caledon East. In light of COVID-19, we are doing most everything virtually. So we are happy to have a Zoom meeting or a telephone call without charge to you to see if we can assist you. Have a happy holidays everyone. Be safe and healthy

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