

# 'Hybrid learning'—teaching kids in-person and online at the same time—robs children of quality education

August 17 2021, by Bonnie Stewart

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In a time of COVID-19 uncertainty, adopting hybrid learning for children will only stress students and teachers further. Credit: Flickr/Phil Roeder, CC BY-SA

With an eye on back-to-school during the COVID-19 pandemic, some education advocates in the [Greater Toronto Area's York](#) and [Peel regions](#) have been [calling for school boards to say no to hybrid learning](#). The hybrid model forces educators to teach online and in-person at the same time.

In May, the York Region District School Board [announced it would be adopting a hybrid model](#) where by "[students attending face-to-face and students attending remotely will be taught simultaneously by the same educators.](#)" The Peel District School Board plans to follow the same model [in secondary schools](#). Other boards across the province are [weighing options now that families have opted for in-person or virtual schooling](#).

What these decisions don't show is that the hybrid learning plan for schooling in the COVID-19 pandemic is more about politics than what's best for kids.

Join York Communities for Public Education for the [#NOHYBRID](#) ChalkTalk on Riverwalk, this Saturday at 10:00am! Bring out your inner artist and chalk the sidewalks of Newmarket Farmers' Market to let everyone know you say [#NoHybrid #StudentsSayNoToHybrid #OnPoli @york4\\_public\\_ed pic.twitter.com/I9ZXxzJXxf](#)

— Black York Region Youth (@BYRYouth) [July 22, 2021](#)

## **Nickel-and-diming education**

At the very time that researchers and child advocates have sounded the alarm about [kids disengaging from school during the pandemic](#), Ontario's Financial Accountability Office recently announced the Ministry of Education's spending plans for the next eight years [fall \\$12.3 billion short of expected expenses](#).

The early pandemic created an [emergency remote teaching](#) crisis: teachers and students were forced online, unprepared. For fall 2020, Ontario's Ford government mandated separate online "[virtual schools](#)," while also re-opening classrooms.

But when the province announced in spring 2021 that [school boards](#) would have to [offer virtual learning for the entire 2021-22 school year](#), amid announcements about funding allocated to "[keep schools safe and support learning renewal and recovery](#)," [there was no mention of funding earmarked for additional teachers](#). It was up to boards to structure and fund their own virtual plans.

Some boards latched onto hybrid, which offers a solution for financial savings. Hybrid learning collapses virtual and face-to-face classroom options under a single teacher's salary, instead of having to hire additional teachers for virtual learning.

## **Refusal to reduce class size**

For boards mandated to provide virtual schooling by a province unwilling to fund separate virtual schools, hybrid education may seem like the only choice.

But the province's Ministry of Education has also likely created demand for a choice to keep students out of school when schools are officially open by repeatedly ignoring [health experts' calls for small class sizes](#) as a COVID-19 safety measure. In the lead-up to September 2020, the Ministry of Education refused to assure families [of smaller class sizes](#) to support physical distancing and COVID safety. The [same is true this year](#).

Hybrid learning, then, isn't a choice so much as an abdication of responsibility by the province. And it doubles demand on teachers, in the process.

## **Teaching kids isn't about 'delivering content'**

The face-to-face strategies effective teachers use to encourage participation and engagement are not the same things that work for online teaching and learning. Hybrid learning models expect teachers to teach in two ways at the same time, splitting their attention and capacity to be present to students.

Hybrid learning plans that have been announced in Ontario also operate on a flawed assumption: they presume kindergarten to Grade 12 teaching is fundamentally about delivery of content. It isn't. It emphasizes [active engagement](#), whether [through play-based learning in kindergarten](#) or engagement with ideas, one's peers or hands-on projects in later grades.

The relationships teachers build and support in their classrooms—and what they can address as a result of observing and knowing their students—are integral to children's engagement, learning and wellness.

A hybrid model disrupts those practices, and encourages a default to simple, slowed-down, teacher-led approaches. A parent of a kindergartener relayed to *Mississauga News* that her child was having [fewer hands-on experiences](#) and was spending more time sitting at a desk while the child's [teacher](#) was focussed on the computer.

And as some teachers in the United States reported last year, hybrid teaching is often "[less effective and twice the work](#)."

## **Approach suited to adult learners**

What Ontario boards call hybrid learning is a repackaging of what higher education calls a ["hyflex" model](#). The "flex" part, however, was designed to allow mature learners to choose when they tune in online and when they show up. That flexibility isn't part of the kindergarten to Grade 12 model.

For all the talk of "choice" in the [government's framing of virtual learning mandates](#), there is minimal choice at the core of the hybrid model. Families who've chosen to have their kids in school, after a year and a half of frustration with limited online engagement, will still find that their children's classrooms are focused on online delivery.

And for teachers, there appears to be neither choice nor the kind of support that such a drastic pivot in professional practice would usually call for. Building equitable classrooms across two learning modes [demands that educators have online skills](#). Instead, teachers will broadcast their regular classroom activities to children at home.

## **Defunding public education**

At best, the hybrid mandate demonstrates a failure to value the high-quality legacy of Ontario education.

At worst, it suggests ways that the province is looking at the pandemic as an opportunity to defund public education. *Press Progress* reports that the Ontario government has invested millions of dollars in private contracts with McKinsey, [a management consultancy with expertise that has been "linked to wage and job cutting policies"](#) and that the company was awarded a contract to manage the province's 2020 [school](#) reopening for \$3.2 million.

Such funds could have been directed to smaller class sizes, virtual schools or a [school COVID-19 safety plan communicated prior to August 11](#).

## **Disrespect for public education**

In a time of COVID-19 uncertainty, adopting a hybrid learning plan for

children will only stress students and teachers further.

Virtual education piggybacked onto classroom learning and relationships demonstrates disrespect for teachers, for [equity in Ontario schools](#) and for [public education](#) generally.

It's not a choice that any board of [education](#) should have to make.

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