



# Back to school debate continues in Nova Scotia

**Updated** Jan. 4, 2022 6:07 p.m. AST

By Paul Hollingsworth

Sean McKenna's daughter graduated last year and his youngest son is still in high school. McKenna has concerns about the COVID-19 virus, but not to the point he thinks schools should close temporarily.

When McKenna found out Nova Scotia schools would not be switching to in-home learning, his reaction was immediate.

"I was fine with it," said McKenna. "They are working very hard to make sure everything is safe. I know with myself, and my son going in there, they are not sending him into an area that is purposely not safe."

When he weighs the positives versus the negatives, being in-school is where McKenna wants his son.

"I think them being back there with their friends, learning is good for their mental health," said McKenna.

Stacey Rudderham is the Co-chair of Nova Scotia Parents for Public Education. Rudderham, who has two school age children, is calling on the provincial government to take a closer look at the issue before schools reopen next week.

"The main concern we have from our parents group, is that the information seems to be taken away from us," said Rudderham.

According to Rudderham, parents are no longer being provided with thorough contact tracing information.

"They are worried about cases in schools and not being informed about them," said Rudderham, who added it all boils down to fears that schools are unsafe environments.

"We have concerns about, that kids can socially distance, that ventilation issues have not been rectified," said Rudderham.

Psychologist Simon Sherry said the back to school debate is causing heightened anxiety at a time when the pandemic has already had a major mental health impact.

“And there is so much more to health than just disease avoidance,” said Sherry.

Sherry has a child in school and he said he understands the concerns of many parents. But he also warns that staying home, indoors, is not an ideal situation. Sherry says isolation and avoidance can lead to depression, anxiety and stress.

“I think it is time for parents and children alike to acknowledge that there are some tolerable risks around COVID-19,” said Sherry.

Rudderham said there is another important factor to consider.

“There are a lot of kids who can’t go back to school,” said Rudderham. “They have immune issues and they have anxiety.”

Rudderham said many children are dealing with a variety of medical and mental health issues that result in school not being the ideal situation for them at this time.