

SURREY  
TEACHERS'  
ASSOCIATION

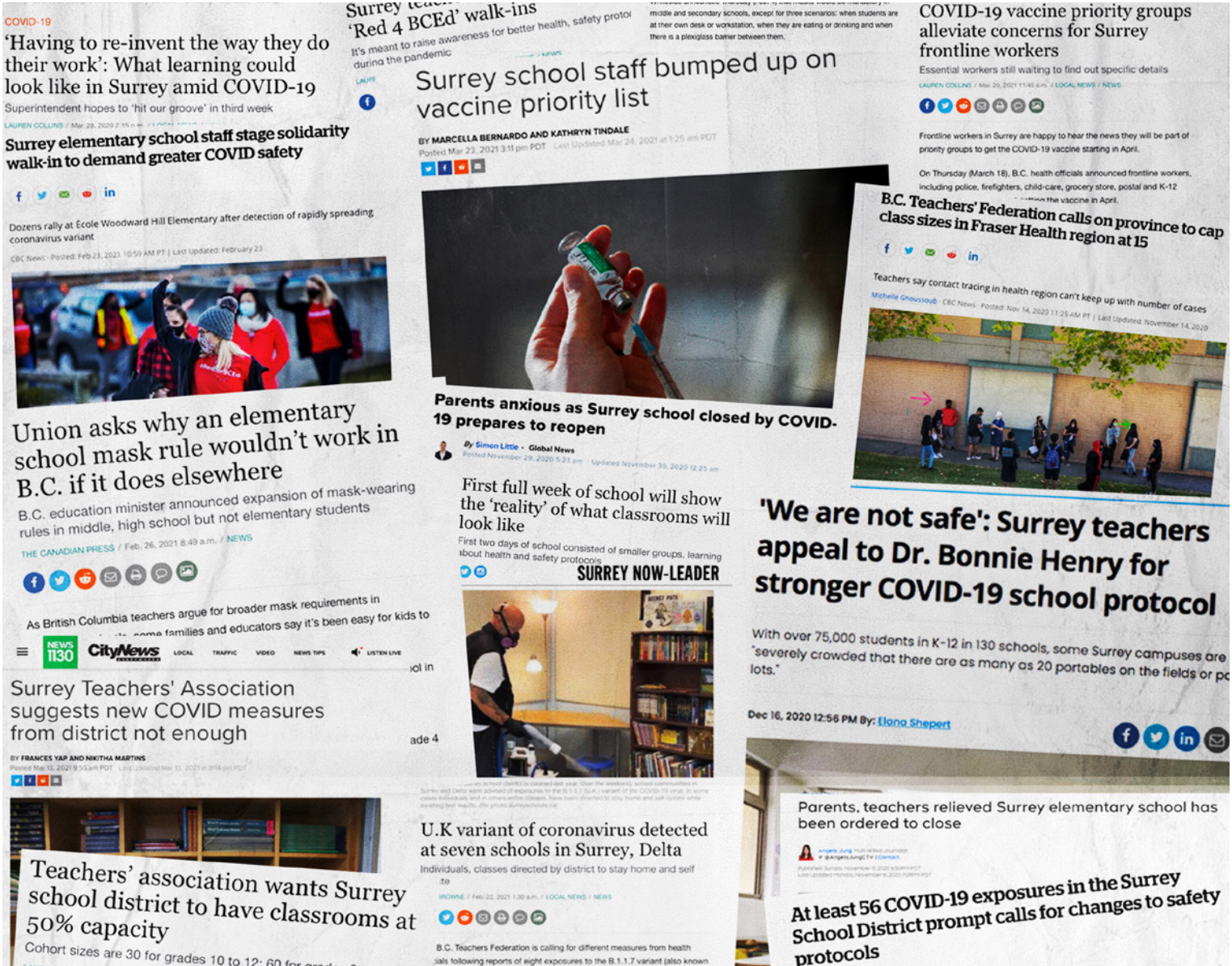
# The Advocate

COVID COMMEMORATIVE EDITION • JUNE 2021



**Creekside  
Elementary  
Teachers with  
a message for  
their students  
on April 7, 2020**

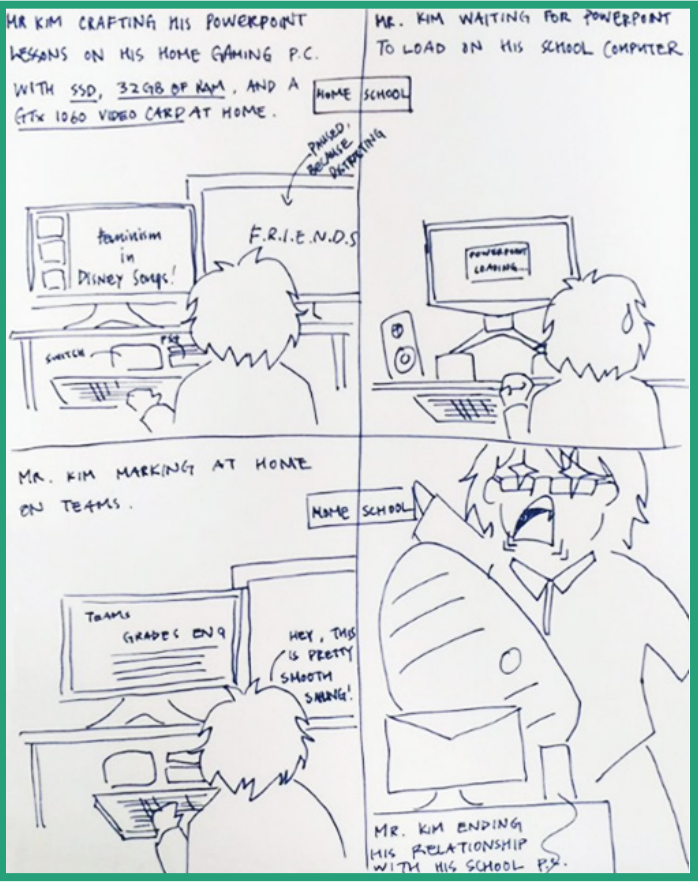




# James Kim's Cartoons

## Provided Comic Relief

We giggled in recognition and appreciation when James Kim's cartoons illustrated our joys and frustrations while we adapted to Emergency Remote Teaching from April to June 2020.



We learned the difference between working at home and working at school.

## President's Reflection

In a media interview soon after schools were closed in March 2020, at the beginning of our more than one year of Covid, I talked about the anxiety teachers were experiencing while they reinvented the way they did their work. Transferring lesson content normally delivered in a classroom to an online format involved a steep learning curve for many teachers that was not made any easier by the District's lack of readiness for such an overhaul of lesson delivery. The District's servers could not handle the extra demand and there were stories of hours of work just vanishing. And this was just the beginning of a series of unfortunate events over the past school year, including returning to schools with insufficient safety measures, adjusting to blended learning, being bombarded by countless exposure notices, and having teachers, students, or loved ones become ill themselves.

This commemorative issue of The Advocate is intended to be a memento, a way of remembering the year we've been

through. It contains records of the extreme difficulties faced by some teachers but there are also cartoons that sprinkled comic relief into our adversity this year.

When I look at the timeline on page 6 of this issue, I am struck by how tenacious Surrey teachers and associated professionals are, how much you had to deal with in your work, and how much you did to ensure that students continued learning despite all the difficulties.

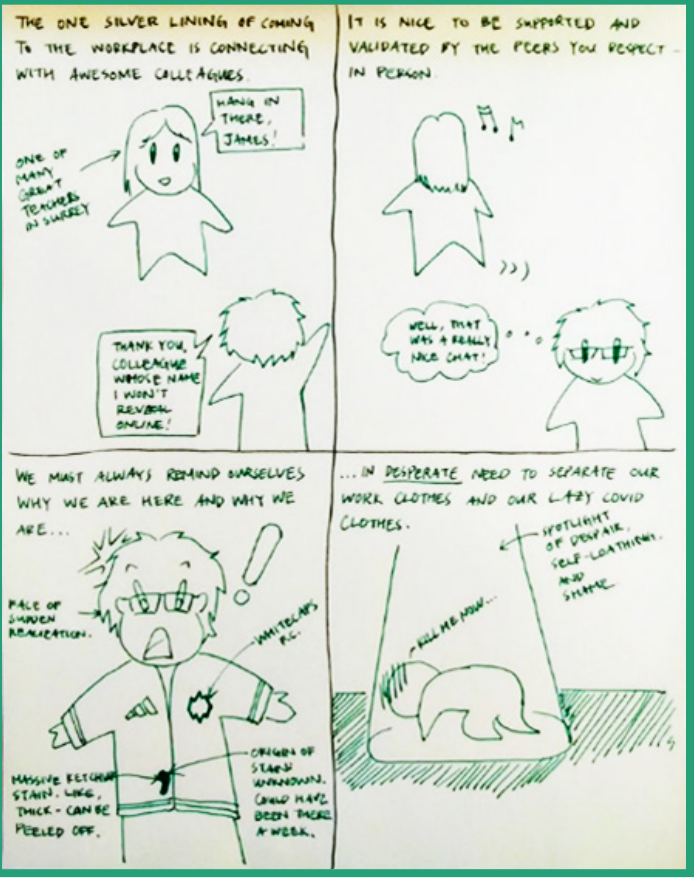
I hope you have made plans to celebrate the end of a grueling 10 months. If there was ever a year when a summer break was "well-deserved" this one surely is!

I hope you enjoy each second of your summer break!

**Matt Westphal**  
**President**



We spent hours and hours creating powerpoints that students didn't watch



When we went back to school in June, we sometimes forgot to check what we were wearing



# SURROUNDED

by Suzanna Wright 2021

Sometimes people ask... So... how's school going this year? Well... And I'm not sure what to say...

It's a bit like that feeling when you're in elementary school and it starts snowing really hard and everyone rushes to the window and you don't know how you'll get home safely...

Or when we practice for a natural disaster or a lockdown...

Or when 9/11 happened and we watched the news all day.

The students and teacher take comfort in each other. We rely on each other for a sense of normalcy, for an outlet of love, laughter, play, learning, and creativity.

We are all braving a storm together, huddled in the same ship - but we are not only being circled by sharks, the sharks are on the ship.

Achoo!

Here comes the third wave!

The double standard of safety is unnerving. Fewer faces, bigger spaces ... except in schools. Masks are mandated ... except in schools.

If this is considered safe at school, why is it not safe in other industries?

No sinks, poor ventilation, crowded, no masks.

A distrust grows. Parents and teachers take it into their own hands to advocate and seek transparency in the data.

BC School Covid Tracker, Citizen-run webpage to track exposures in schools.

I try to reassure my older students after we receive another exposure notice.

Ms. Wright, I'm scared of coming to school. I understand. I'm scared too!

I wipe down the tables again, wash my hands, encourage students to wear masks, and try to maintain some personal space. What else can I do?

MS. WRIGHT!!

The sea is uncertain. Are we headed for calmer waters or gale force winds? Our distress signals have gone ignored and no rescue boats have been deployed.

So we hold on, and ride the rough waves of Covid.



# Covid Timeline of Events

**MARCH 17, 2020:** Adrian Dix, Minister of Health, and Dr. Bonnie Henry, B.C.'s provincial health officer announce that BC schools will continue online after Spring Break rather than returning to in class learning.

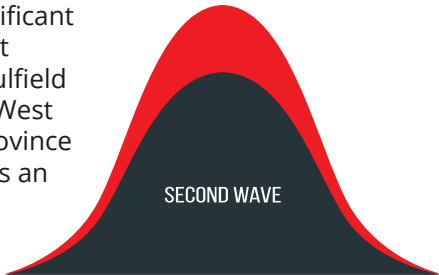
**JUNE 1, 2020:** Schools open for part-time voluntary return to school for students. Most school staff required to return to in-person work full time.

**JULY 29, 2020:** Minister Fleming holds a press conference where he states that in September all classes will return to school at full density. School district administrators had previously been told to plan for high schools at 50% density. BCTF president Teri Mooring was not told of this significant change of plan until the day prior to the press conference. Masks will not be required in classes.

**AUGUST 2020:** Dr. Henry announces that masks are not necessary in classrooms. Teachers write to government representatives and advocate in the media for a mask mandate in schools.

**SEPTEMBER 14, 2020:** BC students have their first day at school of the new school year. School staff were given the previous four days to learn to adjust to new safety protocols.

**OCTOBER 2020:** A significant number of cases result from exposures at Caulfield Elementary School in West Vancouver, but the province is not willing to call this an outbreak.



**NOVEMBER 2020:** Cambridge Elementary School in Surrey is closed due to an outbreak. Widespread testing of staff and students is done after the original 7 cases. An additional two dozen children are discovered to be positive but asymptomatic. Darlene Lourenco, a music teacher who works at the schools ends up in ICU with Covid-19.

**NOVEMBER 18, 2020:** Premier Horgan incorrectly states in a press conference: "The evidence is fairly clear that children are not transmitters of Covid-19 and so adults working within the K-12 system are bringing the virus into the schools and that's leading to outbreaks in pockets of BC". He never apologizes for saying this and Dr. Henry never corrects the statement.

**NOVEMBER 19, 2020:** In the middle of the second wave in BC, Dr. Henry mandates masks inside all public spaces, except for schools.

**DECEMBER 9, 2020:** Health Canada authorizes the first Covid-19 vaccine, the Pfizer BioNTech mRNA vaccine. Vancouver biotech company Acuitas Therapeutics is instrumental in the development of this vaccine since the company provides the lipid nanoparticle technology used to encapsulate the fragile mRNA and deliver it to the body cells.

**JANUARY 2021:** STA creates a Covid-19 Action Committee to focus on Covid-19 situation in Surrey.

**FEBRUARY 4, 2021:** Students from Grades 4–12 are required to wear a mask except when they're working at their desks or eating. K-3 students are excluded.

**FEBRUARY 7, 2021:** The first positive case of the variant found at A.H.P. Matthew with infectious dates of January 26-29. Notification of Covid-19 on Feb 7; notification of variant confirmation a few days later.

**FEBRUARY 23, 2021:** Teachers stage a walk-in at Woodward Hill elementary to protest the way the pandemic is being managed in Surrey schools by Fraser Health.

**MARCH 3, 2021:** Teachers stage protest walk-ins at A.H.P. Matthew and Maple Green elementary schools.

**MARCH 24, 2021:** Staff in schools in the Covid-19 hotzones begin to receive their first vaccination of Astra Zeneca. After news about rare blood clots associated with Astra Zeneca, staff are vaccinated with Pfizer from March 29.

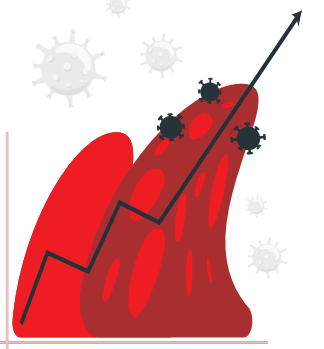
**MARCH 27, 2021:** Fraser Health issues a Health Order requiring students in Grades 4-12 to wear masks at all times in their classrooms. The mandate does not extend to K-3 classrooms.

**APRIL 2021:** Leaked 'secret' data reveals a high number of cases in Surrey's Covid-19 "hotspots" from Newton to Bridgeview along the King George corridor. There is also a release of data from Fraser Health that shows one third of cases in schools involved staff members and that students were indeed transmitting the virus in schools.

**MAY 19, 2021:** Children aged 12-17 able to receive a Covid-19 vaccine but schools will not be used for the vaccine roll out.

**MAY 25, 2021:** Government reveals a four-stage Restart Plan that excludes schools.

**JUNE 2021:** Teachers await notification to book an appointment for their second dose of the Covid-19 vaccine.



Teachers at various schools wearing “Red for Ed” met up before the bell outside the school and walked in together to show their unease at teaching to full classes in the hot zone of the pandemic. These actions caught the attention of media and politicians.



# My Covid-19 Story

By Darlene Lourenco

In November 2020 we were devastated to learn about a teacher at Cambridge elementary, Darlene Lourenco, being in ICU. This is an extract of the Facebook post she wrote about the ordeal when she was recovering.

This is how my virus presented itself: I had severe joint pain for two days, but I have arthritis and disregarded it. My voice was also getting raspy, but it OFTEN is as a music teacher, so I disregarded it. But on the third day, thankfully an in-lieu-of professional day, there was no denying I was sick and got tested. Positive. The only other people I had any physical contact with outside of work was my husband and dear friend. Both tested positive. I was CRUSHED.

I knew that our school had many exposures, more than what was being reported. It was really scary, especially for someone like me who is very susceptible and at high risk. Privacy was paramount, and I understand that logically, but it was a detriment to us all. Fraser Health never deemed me to be a close contact to these exposures and therefore I was never alerted once, even though these unmasked children were singing, laughing and coughing in my room. CRAZY STUPID!! A fellow teacher, on the other hand, told me IMMEDIATELY when she tested positive, and I was so thankful!! But the damage was done, the dreaded COVID had invaded my body. As of today, I know personally 2 teachers (including me), one student teacher, one Educational Assistant and 6 + now 22ish more students (in our last update from Fraser Health) all infected at Cambridge.

When I got my positive result, I immediately wrote a letter to the entire staff at my school and told them. There was no way I was going to stay quiet, even if there would be discomfort, blame or disapproval, I just didn't care. I wanted the whole community to know that they need to watch out for symptoms because I have contact with too many little bodies, over 500 a week. And I care too much about them and our staff to think about staying quiet.

My illness progressed VERY quickly and aggressively. I was weak beyond moving, tired beyond staying conscious, pain from head to toe and having a harder and harder time breathing. My second trip to emergency was in an ambulance and I was failing fast. Please pay attention to how you are feeling!!! Get tested if you feel weird at all!! Seriously!!

I was admitted to Surrey Memorial Hospital for just short of 2 weeks. ICU for a full week, and critical care for the rest. I had infection throughout my lungs, and they were filled with fluid. My blood oxygen was in the low 80s and I ultimately needed to be put on a very specialized oxygen machine.... I wish I remember what it was called. At one point, the ICU was totally FULL and as soon as I was completely and confidently stabilized, they needed my room, and I went to a Covid ward. It was an abrupt change and a busy place, with



more than 4 full pods of Covid patients, most of the single rooms being doubled up. My roommate was a man who didn't speak English! We couldn't see each other, thank God, but we could hear every private and embarrassing sound, LOL!

You may be surprised to learn that I knew nothing of the news while I was in hospital. I didn't know the school was closed and that my name and face were on the news! My family made the decision to not tell me anything because they wanted me focused on healing. Even when I got home, they were very particular and slow to educate me, knowing I am easily emotional and get overwhelmed! Once home, a reporter called for an interview that I agreed to do, and my husband decided that perhaps I should first see a few news clips he had recorded for me.... and I was FLOORED!!

Occasionally a nurse would say, "I know you. You're that teacher on TV." And I thought they had me confused with someone else. Once a nurse told me that Dr. Bonnie Henry herself called to check up on me, and I just thought she was trying to make me laugh and cheer me up, LOL! Like the time the nurse told me he was giving me the very special Trump drugs, hahaha!

I don't do well in hospitals. Some of you know the details of my daughter Lindsey's long and public battle with leukemia. I had only been at Cambridge for one year and that summer our lives changed forever. My baby had cancer. She relapsed over and over again, went through years of chemo, full body and brain radiation, a bone marrow transplant and endless painful, crippling procedures with no success... and we lost her.

I witnessed more fear, pain and an ever-increasing disability than anyone could ever bear seeing their own child endure. This experience has made it impossible for me to be sick or in pain without immense guilt that my own daughter suffered so much more, so buck it up, princess! Hospital stays would mean full on panic attacks, restraints, sedation and totally losing my mind. IT DIDN'T HAPPEN THIS TIME!! For the first time, I was calm (relatively, lol) and I don't DO calm!

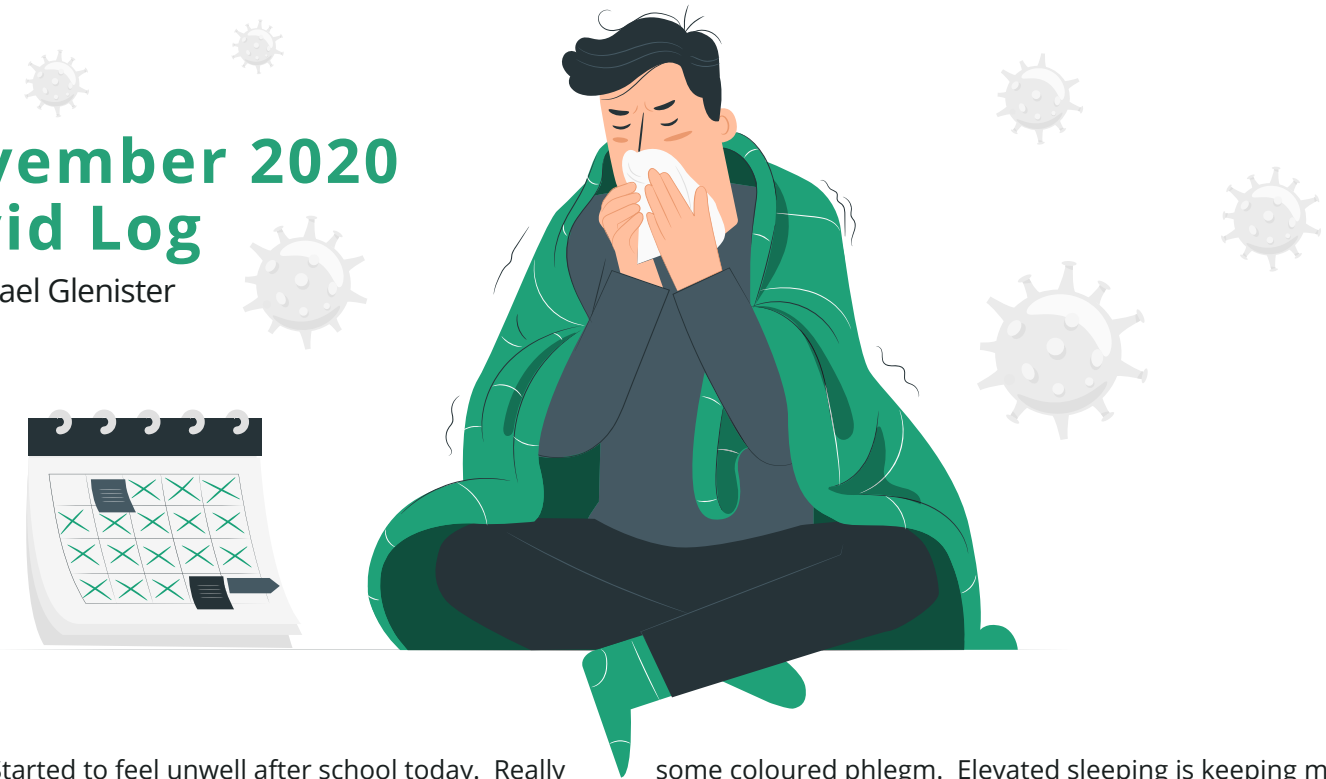
It felt like a miracle. No nightmares, no flashbacks, no crying, no fits of terror and anxiety. I was LIFTED. I felt light, which is no small thing when you're my size and you can barely move, LOL!!

It was YOU! It was your prayers, your love and your support. I feel saved. I feel JOY! I haven't truly felt joy in a decade. I've been going through the motions of life and work like a robot,

painting on a smile and experiencing moments of happiness here and there but always tainted with my loss. I couldn't let go of my pain. If I let go of my pain and my ugly memories of her suffering, I felt like I was letting go of my girl, my most immediate memories of her and dishonouring her journey. But suddenly I feel love and joy, pure and untainted and I truly believe I have changed. Finally!!

## November 2020 Covid Log

By Michael Glenister



**Day 1** – Started to feel unwell after school today. Really hope I'm just feeling run down, or it is just paranoia about Covid. Not a good time to be sick.

**Day 2** – Having fever symptoms, and have to take a cool shower every so often to get it under control. Just in time for the weekend! Off to take a Covid test just to be sure.

**Day 3** – Off and on fever, and fatigue. Don't feel like doing much, and not very hungry, so I lay around and drink lots of fluids. I hope it isn't Covid...

**Day 4** – More of the same. Almost time to check to see if my Covid results are in...but Fraser Health has beaten me to it. Damn, I'm positive...and have to isolate for 10 days from Day 1. I alert my relatives about the situation. The kids are with their mum this week, so I suggest they get a Covid test too. It's also time to email my principal and department. Fortunately that while it is the last week of the first quarter, I had planned out the entire week on Friday, so my TOC shouldn't have too difficult a time.

**Day 5** – No fever, just tired. Uh oh, I'm developing a slight cough. I really don't want my sinuses to back up, so I'm setting my bed up so that my head stays raised the entire night. Drinking lots of fluids, and mainly eating soup or small meals.

**Day 6 to 7** – Mainly just laying around, sleeping and drinking fluids. Cough is getting worse. I've coughed up

some coloured phlegm. Elevated sleeping is keeping my sinuses clear – I hate blowing my nose, etc.

**Day 8 to 10** – More of the same. Still coughing, but phlegm is colourless. I tend to cough more at night for some reason. A couple of times the coughing has been so intense that I'm worried that I'm going to throw up. Paranoid that if it got much worse, then one would be heading to the hospital to be put on a ventilator. Fortunately that doesn't happen.

**Day 11** – Starting to feel better. While I don't have to isolate anymore, I am not well enough to return to school. Still coughing frequently, but energy levels are starting to return, and I think it is just my system clearing out the debris in my lungs. Fortunately I get a capable TOC who can begin the second quarter courses for me.

**Day 12 to 18** – Energy levels are back to almost normal. Cough has steadily improved, except when I'm talking to relatives trying to explain that I'm getting better.

**Day 19** – I feel well enough to go back to school, but I have to keep a container of juice handy in case I start coughing. Worksafe BC suggests a gradual return to work, so I work intermittently over the next two weeks to ensure I'm not straining myself and continue to improve.

Cough lingers, and is finally gone around the second week of December.



# Surrey Teachers Face Covid-19, in Full Classrooms, 2020-2021

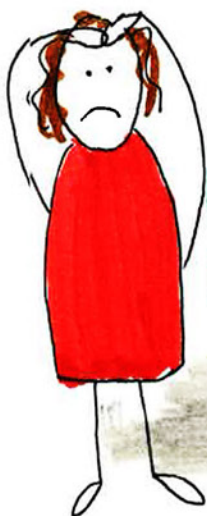
By Julia MacRae

And then the least important measure, **PPE**, becomes the only one that might be implemented. And it is **OPTIONAL??**



I'll wear a mask and face shield to protect your kids and my colleagues, but if they are optional, am I safe?

As a teacher, I'm even more worried about **Personal Measures**. Because:



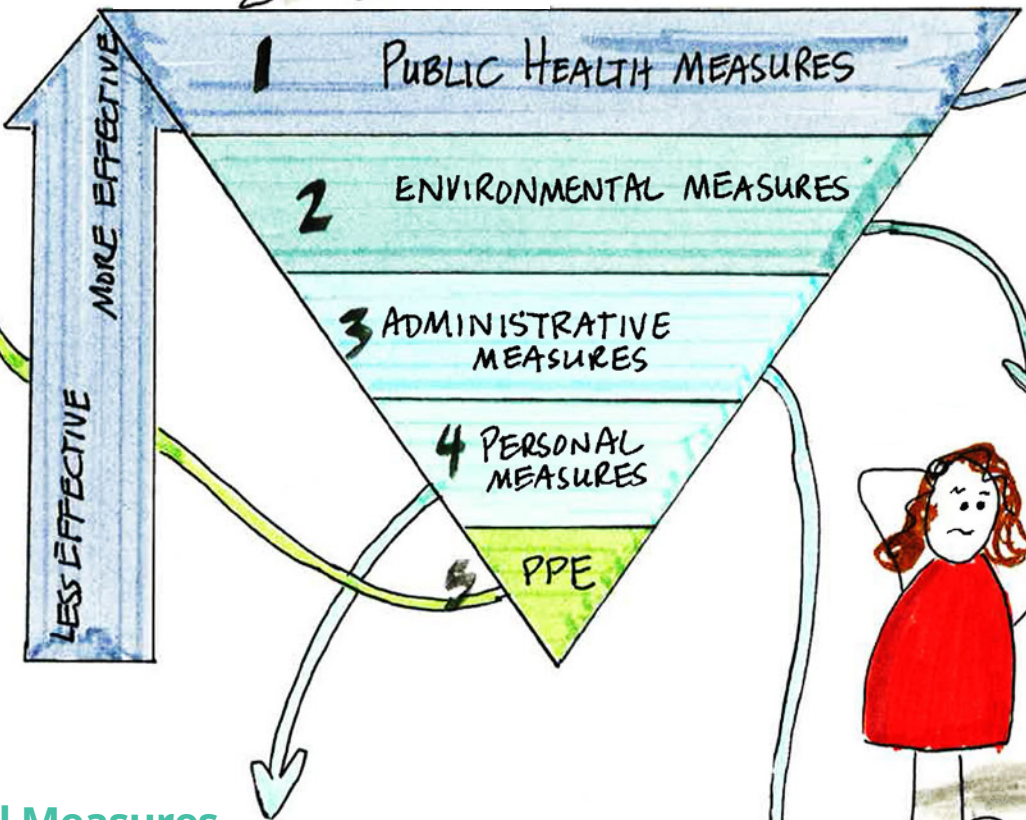
Personal social distancing is impossible in full classrooms

Schools don't have many sinks for handwashing

Will staff get extra sick days to stay home with mild symptoms?

Will parents send sick kids to school? This, we can't control!

**SEPTEMBER 2020:** I am a teacher getting ready to go back to school in BC, and I have some questions about these "**Layers of protection to control Covid-19**".



If these five layers are supposed to protect us in our classrooms, I see some big holes in Surrey.

## Public Health Measures

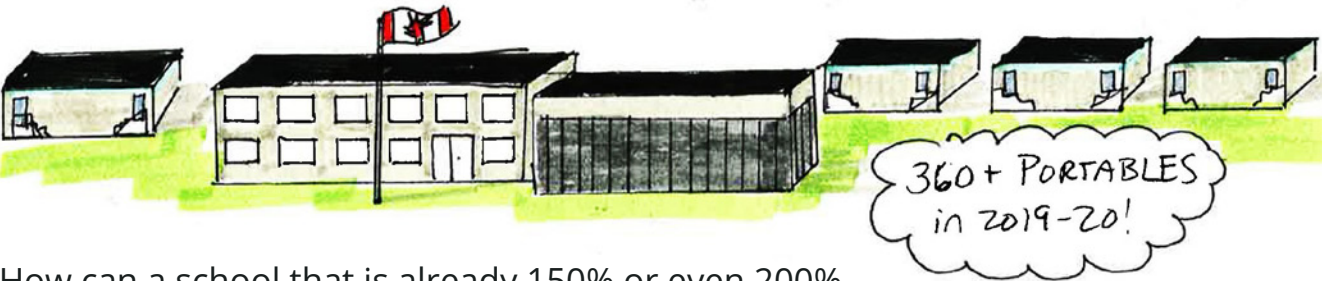
Public Health Measures means low community levels of the virus and few outbreaks! But, Surrey is in Fraser Health region where most Covid-19 cases are in BC! And there are recent community cases! Plus I see life here is almost back to normal... at least judging by the traffic!

**Environmental Measures** means increased cleaning, physical barriers and routines, more outdoor time, etc.

That sounds great, but there will be no barriers between students in class, there are so many touch points in schools for little hands everywhere, and our custodians can't be miracle workers!

## Administrative Measures

As for Administrative Measures, school schedules can be changed, but it is quite complicated, and the main problem in Surrey is our situation of **EXTREMELY OVERCROWDED** schools!



How can a school that is already 150% or even 200% over-capacity to begin with, contain separate cohorts to keep kids apart?!



# The Pandemic's Effects on the Diaspora and Educational Practice

By Regie Plana-Alcuaz



I have not seen my mother, sister, and brother in person for the past four years; my twin sister for three. If you spent the holidays on a video call with loved ones, that's a situation that most immigrants have been experiencing since the advent of visual communications technology. Majority of my family reside in the Philippines, where there's barely a pandemic plan and one of the worries on our minds is that if a loved one passes away, there is little to be done to support our families as we normally would, flying back to our country of birth to commiserate and condole. Nowadays, instead of attending a special occasion in person, we watch a livestream as it occurs, as I did when my younger brother was ordained as a deacon in Manila back in 19 March 2021.

As a culture, Filipinos draw strength from family ties, and this global pandemic has strained this basic societal need. I imagine that the same is true for other immigrant groups, some of which share the reason for migration of attaining a better life abroad, and of sending money back to their country of origin to support loved ones. In 2017, Filipinos sent \$1.2 billion in remittances, the most of any group sending international money transfers, according to Statistics Canada.

As an immigrant to Canada, I am one of almost one million Filipinos that comprise about 2.6% of the Canadian population. I came four years ago and taught for a little over

three years in a remote First Nations community in NW BC. When the pandemic hit, my previous school district, SD 92 (Nisga'a), didn't return to school after spring break. Many teachers were unprepared to go online for work, and we all learned on the go. There was no ideal scenario – many students, especially in Elementary, need the connection to their teacher and classmates that being physically in the classroom brings. Not everyone had the capability to go online for classes. I found myself driving around the village on a weekly basis to say hi to students and drop off schoolwork for those who weren't able to pick them up from school. Scheduling students for virtual meetings was difficult, particularly because you had to adjust to students' and parents' availability, as they occasionally needed adult supervision or assistance. This was worse for students who had attention deficits and could not sit in front of a computer for long.

My husband and I decided to transfer to the lower mainland to be closer to family and better medical care, and better employment opportunities for him. Due to the high rate of Covid-19 cases in the area I moved to this school year, Surrey was the first district to get vaccinations for teachers. While this was welcome news, many teachers were still concerned over a lack of a mask mandate which educators have been campaigning for since students began returning to school. It was such a contrast to the mask requirements for public spaces where people are still exhorted to stay two metres apart, whereas there could be 30 persons in a classroom with poor ventilation. The cohort model didn't even consider the fact that students interact with so many different groups outside of school, and that non-enrolling teachers like myself could never really have a cohort. It also didn't help when the first vaccine offered to teachers was then recalled due to blood clot concerns, especially for women under 55. Or when new, more infectious variants of the virus started spreading.

People have different ways of coping with this experience, and mine has been to throw myself into work – aside from my day job as an Integration Support Teacher at two elementary schools, Colebrook and Bonaccord, I am also taking American Sign Language lessons offered through the district, took on the SOGI lead position at my base school, and am involved in 4 committees in Surrey Schools: Mentorship Advisory Team, Status of Women Committee, Ad Hoc Committee for Members of Colour, and the Education Governance Committee. It was a good way to get to know other members of Surrey Schools, since we can't really meet each other in person or even socialize with the teachers at our schools. These are aside from my third year in the BCTF Committee for Action on Social Justice: Peace and Global Education advisory group and my first year with the Canadian Teachers' Federation Advisory Group on the

“As I see it, this situation has been a missed opportunity to overhaul the educational system.”

Status of Women. I can't count how many virtual meetings and conferences I've attended in the past year. IN a sense, it was good because I didn't have to spend money to travel to where they were held. On the other hand, I miss seeing new places.

As I see it, this situation has been a missed opportunity to overhaul the educational system. Instead of using this time to refresh our ideas on how education can be delivered and why it should be changed from the original program meant to grow factory workers, there are still assessments going on that are in no way beneficial to students, educators, or even the system, seeing that these are being done for private entities that profit from them. As we have seen from this year, schools are relied on to provide services that are usually in the domain of social welfare - whether sustenance or non-academic support - and there's no major evidence of anything being done to sufficiently rectify that. Exacerbating these issues are social justice concerns that have become blatantly prominent in the Trump era: the relationship between law enforcement and race, the continued lack of gender parity, the ever-widening chasm between the 1% and the rest of humanity, the quickening rate of environmental damage. Then add Covid-19 to the mix and these problems are much more starkly highlighted.

While a bit of light can be seen at the end of the tunnel due to the advent of increasingly effective vaccines, inoculations will still take some time to reach a critical mass. It's not too late to consider changes to schooling as we know it. The only question is if the government and school administration are willing to allow a revolutionary shift in educational services to consider what is truly important here and now, to be inclusive of innovative practices from the experiences of those who are on the ground. This pandemic is showing us where our true priorities should lie. After all, who are considered the essential workers? Sadly, it's the people who actually aren't paid or treated very well.

We got the attention of Surrey MLAs with signs and honks on our tour of their constituency offices!





# Covid-19 Pandemic from Teachers’ Perspectives

## Tanis Filiatrault teaches at Senator Reid Elementary

As a staff we are wondering what we can do to help encourage community members to go get vaccinated. We were talking about teaching the kids how to sign their parents up to get vaccinated. The government should be providing communication in multiple languages to get people signed up ASAP! Targeted vaccinations in this area would have been a game changer. Language, internet accessibility, internet literacy, and people's jobs are a barrier to getting vaccinated and the information they need in my school community.

## Alvin Shum is an Integration Support Teacher at Westerman Elementary

Sanitize. Physically distance. Mask on. These safety procedures are etched into our daily teaching practice now. Am I Covid positive? Who did I interact with in the past few days? Who else in my classroom is affected? Did I pass Covid onto my partner or children? Why do classroom teachers not have a plexiglass? Why did it take so long for Newton to get prioritized? With multiple primary students getting covid in our school, why are they still not required to wear a mask?

## Chelsea Chow teaches at Lena Shaw Elementary

I have a class with 14 Kindergarten students. We can't social distance in my Kindergarten class. I have circular tables with no other option, so the kids face each other all day. I try to get them to wear masks, but don't have a mandate to back me up. When kids get sick at school, their parents struggle to get them tested. Kids aren't getting tested. I send sick kids home weekly, and they return without being tested. We can't blame families - so many in our community can't afford to take time off work. One guardian of a designated student in my class said she can't get her child tested - they have no car, and she has an injury. She can't possibly walk her sick kid, who struggles with behaviour, to get a bothersome, if not painful, medical test.

I have been tested for COVID eight times. I am being cautious by taking sick days when I feel ill, and I am running out of sick days. I am a young teacher with chronic illness - I need my sick days, but I want to keep my class safe. We are told high-touch items and shared manipulative will be "fogged" - but they aren't and we are expected to wash them ourselves. We don't get time to wash them, so we either do it on our own time or we don't use them at all. I can't do it all. I can't distance from the kids - despite my best efforts. This is public schooling and sometimes we get hugged, or sometimes we get hit.

## Wah Gee teaches at Cindrich Elementary

I am teaching blended this year which is a blessing in disguise since I have an immunocompromised wife at home. I cannot take risks with Covid.



Wah Gee, Cindrich Elementary

Teachers here worry about parents not getting their children tested after they've had close contacts with positive cases. More testing would have led to more self-isolations instead of only self-monitoring!

## Kelsey Litke teaches at Senator Reid Elementary

I regularly see staff who look completely overwhelmed with the current situation. Many teachers have experienced the stress of knowing a student or a student's family member has tested positive and then having to wait, continuing to teach, until Fraser Health makes the determination that they need to isolate or not. These teachers are at the mercy of official decision makers and families who may be unwilling or unable to arrange for their children to be tested.

I am teaching a blended learning class this and see firsthand how the exposure notices impact my families. Less than 20% of my class regularly attend the in-person learning afternoons because they are afraid. These students are missing out on the equivalent of day of school each week.

I feel that the health authority is not prioritizing our families nearly enough -- where is the translated information about registering for and receiving vaccinations? Where is the paid time off from fast food, restaurant, factory, or trucking jobs to be able to get vaccinated or vaccinations within jobsites?



Hyekyung Lee, Green Timbers Elementary

## Hyekyung Lee teaches at Green Timbers Elementary

Teaching in Surrey's Covid hotspot zone is what I imagine will be my closest experience to living in a war zone. I'm living with that constant anxiety and fear that I might die or someone I care about will die. Being immune-compromised, I worry that my children may become orphans, and there's also that sense of guilt that I might be bringing home the virus to my partner, children, and elderly parents. Remember teachers have lives and responsibilities that go far beyond the walls of the school.

For the past three consecutive weeks there have been several classes isolating at home while several other teachers were told by Fraser health to be on alert. There seems to be no specific procedure that Fraser Health is following in regard to how they deal with Covid 19 in the classrooms. Different people are asking teachers different questions, and many are not even being contacted. Their guidelines for isolating students appear to be dependent on the person calling them which accounts for the different results, that is, sometimes the entire class including the teacher isolates, sometimes only a few students and the teacher isolates, other times the only the child with Covid, the EA, and the music teacher isolates.

What frustrates teachers the most is the length of time that it takes for Fraser Health to alert us. Being told that you have been in contact with someone with Covid seven or more days ago is frightening. We have to keep track of everything that has happened for the past one week or even longer. Even if we have a regular seating plan and limited movement in the classroom, we really don't know which students played together without masks outside for 15 - 20 minutes during recess and lunch.

## Trisha Cole teaches at Cindrich Elementary

In my class I've had several students ordered to isolate as close contacts but many more have been kept home out of fear by their parents.

I am grateful that I have had my first vaccination, or I would be terrified right now of getting sick. As it is, I am afraid of unknowingly carrying the virus asymptotically home to my own kids.

My dad has Stage 4 cancer, and I can't see him at all for fear of accidentally bringing the virus to him. He and my mom have had their first vaccinations, but dad's immune system is terribly compromised. My remaining time with him is growing shorter and all I can do is talk to him on the phone.

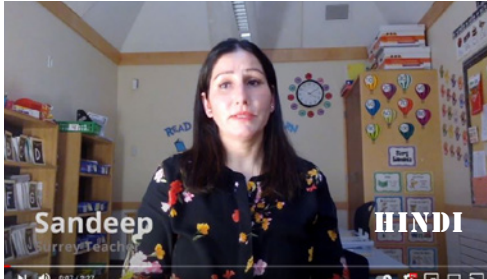
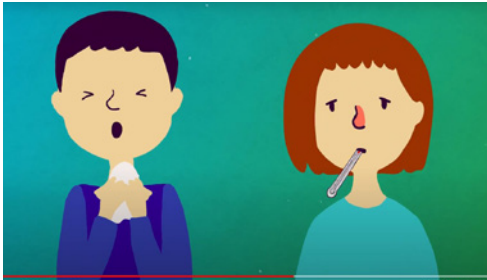
Despite all this, I'm so used to getting Covid notifications now that it doesn't really change anything. I'm desensitized to it all. We in my school community are already doing absolutely everything we can to be as safe as possible. There is nothing else we can do. We have implemented every safety protocol that has been recommended.



Trisha Cole, Cindrich Elementary



Surrey Teachers recorded videos in 14 languages imploring parents to send their children and teens to school masked.



I have often wondered whether humanity would experience a global pandemic during my lifetime on the scale of the Spanish flu pandemic. Well, here we are! It has been an emotional and fascinating experience to have lived through this turbulent time. It has also been inspirational from a science perspective.

What has been starkly different between the Spanish Flu pandemic in 1921 and the Covid-19 pandemic now is that humanity's collective scientific knowledge has allowed us to create vaccines in record time with a high degree of safety and reliability. It is truly miraculous that the covid vaccines have been developed so quickly - eleven months from determining the genetic sequence of the virus to Health Canada approval of the first vaccines and shots in arms. These vaccines will save millions of lives.

I think some people alive today forget how many died of infectious diseases many decades ago in the days of no vaccines and few medicines. I am a Surrey high school science teacher now, but for the first few years after I graduated from university, I worked as a vaccine researcher at Connaught Laboratories, a vaccine manufacturer in Toronto.

Connaught was, until the late 1980s, a Canadian owned scientific company, formed in 1914 to produce diphtheria antitoxin. Diphtheria was a major cause of illness and death at the time. The company was involved in insulin production after Canadian scientists Fredrick Banting and Charles Best isolated insulin at the University of Toronto in 1921. Connaught was also involved in the smallpox eradication program and, perhaps most significantly, the company did critical research to enable the industrial production of the Salk polio vaccine in the 1950s.

My work at the company was to help with research on the pertussis (whooping cough) vaccine and it was wonderful to know that I was putting the skills I had acquired in my biochemistry degree to good use. I was and still am proud to know that I was working to help create these critically important vaccines that save lives.

Humanity owes a great debt to the thousands of people who have worked tirelessly to create the new covid vaccines for us. The speed with which this happened would not have been possible without the broad scientific research done in the decades prior to this pandemic. All of that important scientific work over many, many years has coalesced to allow us to beat back this virus with vaccines.

Did you know that to deliver the fragile mRNA molecule to the cells in the Pfizer vaccine requires a lipid nanoparticle that was developed by the Vancouver company Acuris Therapeutics, based on years of prior research? A lipid nanoparticle is basically a tiny circle of fat that encloses a strand of mRNA and allows it to be taken in by the cells. The mRNA instructs the cells to make the viral spike protein, the body recognizes it as "foreign" and then the immune system begins to make antibodies against it.

I will always remember how elated and immensely grateful I was on March 31, the day I got my first Pfizer shot. For me, with my background doing vaccine research and my years as a science teacher I was amazed to be living through a time when humanity accomplished such an amazing feat as using science to beat back a formidable threat to the lives of everyone in the world.





# Looking back on our Covid year

By Julia MacRae

Walking in at Woodward Hill, with support from BCTF President Teri Mooring, and 2nd VP Carole Gordon.

I've always believed in a union's power to protect workers but I confess that this past Covid year has tested that belief. Before spring 2020 I would have never imagined that if teachers were faced with a deadly threat, our union would be powerless to do anything about that. But now I know that even with the best efforts, we can still fail in ensuring that all teachers feel safe at work.

We did all the right things from the beginning. Discussions with district officials followed the announcement of the closure during spring break. The STA was consulted about the details of the restrictions necessary for a return of teachers after the break. We made sure that the District understood what teachers needed in order not only to feel safe but to be safe as well.

In May when the Ministry decided that there would be a partial return to schools the following month, we once again were in consultations with the district, providing them with teachers' perspective on what a partial return would mean and entail.

At the BCTF level teachers were part of a provincial steering committee that was supposed to ensure safety at a

provincial level. A few months later we realized that very little of what teachers on that committee said was actually implemented.

But in the summer of 2020 we were still hopeful that teachers' concerns were being heard and their suggestions taken seriously.

In this spirit of hope, the STA surveyed our members in summer 2020 about the return in the fall. We were shocked by the number of members who responded to the survey. Thousands of members told us they were nervous and anxious. We used this information in a media campaign to alert public officials about teachers' concerns.

If you conduct a Google search for 'Surrey teachers' between June 2020 and June 2021, you'll see dozens of media articles highlighting our ongoing concerns about the safety of our members over the past year. Matt and I were interviewed numerous times on TV and radio and for print media. No opportunity was wasted to get the message across to the public and directly to our MLAs and the Minister that we were afraid for the safety of our members in Surrey schools. Despite all that, it became clear that public officials

refused to hear our pleas.

When the 5-stage Restart Plan was released in the summer, we understood that it was designed to be responsive to increases in the danger to students and teachers. It was not. It was an old-fashioned bait and switch, creating an illusion that something would be forthcoming which clearly was never going to happen.

It took 7 months of demanding a mask mandate in our classrooms before we got a partial one. We still don't have a K-3 mask mandate.



Julia creating signs for the car rally

Even though the federal government provided funding, it was some time before the process of asking for and receiving plexiglass barriers was smooth for teachers working close up with students. While we heard daily the importance of physical distancing in public spaces, the fact that it was impossible to distance in overcrowded classrooms was brushed over by public health officials. When Canada's Chief Medical Officer warned that the most dangerous environment for virus transmission was a crowded, enclosed space with poor ventilation, we knew and tried to point out that this was exactly the working conditions of teachers, the learning conditions of students.

Our advocacy did not stop. We advocated for better ventilation, for more outside learning spaces, for lower density of humans in classrooms. Our advocacy failed to get those things despite Surrey being a hotspot of high Covid-19 transmission. It is still amazing to me that we never moved to stage 3 or 4 in Surrey, because it seemed so obvious that a circuit breaker was needed, especially in April's third wave when the variants were spreading rapidly throughout the district.

Teachers, EAs, administrators, students and families got sick, some seriously, but we do not know whether anyone

died as a result of being exposed to Covid 19 at a school. That awful scenario may yet be revealed. We do know that hundreds of classes and individuals had to self isolate as a result of known exposures at school and that thousands of notices of exposure went out to our school communities. Some schools had exposures almost every day of the school year. After the first few months of daily notices and early morning staff meetings, we became numb to the news of yet another notification.

Now that we've come to the end of the year of Covid, I feel sadness when I reflect on how little we could do to protect our members. Every day this year I thought the worst nightmare for me would be if there was something that we could have done but didn't. But I now know that we did all that we could as a union since the government prioritized 'the economy' instead of the safety of teachers and students in schools. There wasn't anything more we could have done to change that fact especially since members have only so much energy to be a teacher during a pandemic. Figuring out how to protest under Covid restrictions was also quite a challenge.

We are now facing a tight budget next year in the school district. Even though there are real reasons for it,

(the main one being immigration has stopped because of the pandemic), the timing of the drastic budget cuts feels like a political ploy to reduce our expectations in bargaining and a continuation of the expectations on school staff to prop up an underfunded system.

It does not matter who is in government, we must continue to demand generous funding of public education. All students deserve a great education that meets their learning needs. Surrey teachers led the province in the fight for class size limitations way back in 1974. We have always been leaders in demanding more for our members and for our students. We will continue to use our creativity and passion in the ongoing struggle for an equitable education system..

I'm going to take time this summer to rest and recuperate so that I'm ready to begin again with our fight for a public education system that could adapt with ease to the next pandemic. I'm going to replace the regret of not doing enough this past year with a focus on working for a school system where good ventilation, small class sizes, and enough supports for all students is the norm. I hope you'll join me in that fight.







Maple Green Elementary



Parent support at Woodward Hill Elementary



L.A. Matheson Secondary



Woodward Hill Elementary



Woodward Hill Elementary



Riverdale Elementary



L.A. Matheson Secondary