



## NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Toronto, ON

Day 3

April 1, 2023

### EVIDENCE

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**Witness 9: Dr. Irvin Studin**

Full Day 3 Timestamp: 06:47:50–07:35:02

Source URL: <https://rumble.com/v2frcs0-national-citizens-inquiry-toronto-day-3.html>

[00:00:00]

**Allan Rouben**

Can we get your full name, please?

**Dr. Irvin Studin**

Irvin Studin.

**Allan Rouben**

How do you spell that?

**Dr. Irvin Studin**

I-R-V-I-N S-T-U-D-I-N.

**Allan Rouben**

And do you swear that the evidence you will give today will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

**Dr. Irvin Studin**

I do.

**Allan Rouben**

Tell us a little bit about your work and educational background [Exhibit TO-4].

**Dr. Irvin Studin**

Thank you for having me first of all. And it's difficult to go after such powerful testimony. I've been following that story very carefully. My sincere condolences to the family.

I'm Irvin Studin. I chair the Worldwide Commission to Educate All Kids (Post-Pandemic), which was created in January of 2021 to address what I think is the major catastrophe of the pandemic period, amongst many catastrophes. And that's what happened to the young people, particularly in respect to education: the collapse of education across Canada in general, in particular in Ontario. I also preside the Institute for 21st Century Questions, which is a major think tank in Canada, and edit a magazine called *Global Brief*.

**Allan Rouben**

And before you got involved with that, give us some examples of the type of work you were doing.

**Dr. Irvin Studin**

I call myself a policy expert across a variety of fields, domestic and international alike. I worked for many years at the Privy Council Office, the Prime Minister's department in Ottawa. I was on secondment in the Prime Minister's department in Canberra and Australia at the start of my career. I was a professor at multiple universities, U of T, York, Singapore, Eastern Europe, so I have a variety of hats.

**Allan Rouben**

And your educational background, just what was the highest level of education that you had?

**Dr. Irvin Studin**

I have a PhD in constitutional law at Osgoode Hall, graduated in 2014. I have two degrees from the U.K., one from Oxford, one from the London School of Economics. I was a Rhodes Scholar. And before that my undergraduate was at the Schulich School of Business at York University.

**Allan Rouben**

In terms of the subject matter that brings you here today, how did you get interested in that?

**Dr. Irvin Studin**

I began to see children out of school from the late summer, early fall of 2020. And it took me several months to understand what I was seeing, and then on inspection of a larger hypothesis, to really be able to appreciate the extent of the catastrophe at our feet. Because I'm going to quote from some 19th century writers that had a felt appreciation of this catastrophe—but this was completely foreign to our Canadian understanding. That is, in a very advanced country, that degree of collapse for children and childhoods and education is completely foreign.

So I began to see them at my feet. There were three or four instances where it was very personal in my own networks. Then I began to inspect it across the country. And then we brought about 60 countries together. And we discovered a phenomenon that I'll explain when I get into the guts of my testimony, what we came to call "third bucket kids." That is, kids who were neither in physical school, classical school, the one all of us appreciated growing up. They were not in virtual online school. They were in no school at all. I'm

talking about zero school. I'm not talking about homeschooling, pod-schooling—none of these fetishes. I'm talking about the Dickensian condition of no school.

And I might surprise people by saying that, before the pandemic, 500 million children—who were after the school closed, out of school—were normal children enjoying regular schooling. After the pandemic, after the school closed, there were at least 500 million children around the world, the size of the European Union, ejected from schooling. And a lot in our own country. And then I'll go into that as we proceed, I'm sure.

### **Allan Rouben**

All right. So you've talked about the buckets. What is the first bucket?

### **Dr. Irvin Studin**

The reason I talk about buckets, colleagues, you might imagine three glasses like this. The first glass is physical school, the one that we all appreciated as common school—largely public school, but some private school—across the country until March of 2020. Physical school. The second bucket is virtual school, the one we imagined everyone pivoted to as soon as we shuttered the schools physically: the second bucket.

[00:05:00]

And there's a third bucket, which we didn't see, didn't appreciate, and still don't feel. And that is, I repeat, zero school. And this can happen at any age. It can happen at age seven and it certainly happens at older ages. And this is a phenomenon I'll explain, but these children are in no education or in deep under-education. And they never returned. They have not returned once the schools reopened or renormalized, for reasons I'll explain.

But the reason we talk about the buckets is because if I say “no school” to our Canadian mentality, it's lost. “What do you mean no school? You must be a critic of the education system. You must be talking about homeschooling, or the child is taking a break.” I repeat, colleagues, fellow Canadians, fellow Ontarians, fellow humans: No. School. The kids were ejected from the first bucket to the third bucket, or from the second to the third bucket, through all sorts of very paradoxical phenomena that I'll explain.

It took us a while to study this. When we brought the 60 countries together, we realized that this is a phenomenon that is as common in India as it is in the United States, in Canada, in Britain, and so we had to divine this terminology to get it through our heads. Third bucket, no school. First bucket, school. Second bucket, virtual school. But the transition from the first bucket to the third bucket is very, very rapid. And third bucket is misery. Third bucket is misery, because nobody's going to want—no matter what we tell ourselves online, no matter the delusions we recount to ourselves—no one is going to speak to a child who has a grade 7, 8, 9, 10 education five years from now when he or she is an adult, undereducated or not educated at all, in a post-pandemic world that is much more fastidious, much more cruel. And we've done this to these children.

### **Allan Rouben**

How did the children land up in the third bucket?

## Dr. Irvin Studin

Yeah. Let me just quote quickly—I don't have the right glasses on—*Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. Charles Dickens was, as you'll know, a famous 19th century writer who serialized books on the misery of children in Victorian England. And in *Great Expectations*, Pip, a miserable child, talks to Joe. He says:

“Why didn't you ever go to school, Joe, when you were as little as me?”

“Well, Pip,” said Joe, taking up the poker, and settling himself to his usual occupation when he was thoughtful, of slowly raking the fire between the lower bars: “I'll tell you. My father, Pip, he were given to drink, and when he were overtook with drink, he hammered away at my mother, most onmerciful. It were a'most the only hammering he did, indeed, 'xcepting at myself. And he hammered at me with a wigour only to be equalled by the wigour with which he didn't hammer at his anwil.—You're a listening and understanding, Pip?” “Yes, Joe.”

“Consequence, my mother and me we ran away from my father several times; and then my mother she'd go out to work, and she'd say, 'Joe,' she'd say, 'now, please God, you shall have some schooling, child,' and she'd put me to school. But my father were that good in his hart that he couldn't abear to be without us. So he'd come with a most tremenjous crowd and make such a row at the doors of the houses where we was, that they used to be obligated to have no more to do with us and to give us to him. And then he took us home and hammered us. Which, you see, Pip,” said Joe, pausing in his meditative raking of the fire, and looking at me, “were a drawback on my learning.”

So what happened as soon as we shuttered the schools in March of 2020?

Let me just tell you the extent to which we shuttered the schools. Ontario was the most catastrophic: March 17, 2020 to June 30, 2020. January 7, 2021 to February 10, 2021. April 19, 2021 to June 30, 2021. And the first two weeks of 2022. And in between, hundreds of ad hoc bespoke school closures, mostly dictated by Public Health. These were general school closures that I recounted, dictated by the Premier and the Minister of Education. The longest in North America.

As soon as we closed the schools, we said we're going online. But immediately, you have a contingent of children and families who have no internet access and no mobile access.

[00:10:00]

They're between 1 and 6 per cent of the population on Statistics Canada numbers.

Very well. That's your baseline ouster to the third bucket. That may grow over time as resources become more scarce. But what happens within the home when we imagine a child to be remote-learning? What if you're in an abusive home, like Joe recounts? You were a star mathematics pupil and that was your saving grace. You went to school. Now you're at home in an abusive home. And very well, you may be heroic for two weeks. But on the periods I described, that are catastrophically long, you're in the third bucket before long. And you're abused for two years in your home while everyone imagines that you're virtual learning.

Very well. You don't speak English or French. You're from a new immigrant home. Two years online, you're in the third bucket. You have a physical or intellectual learning disability. You're in the third bucket. Your family has no resources. You run out of money

during the pandemic. Or someone's got sick, you're off to work at 13, 14 years old. You're in the third bucket.

The most catastrophic category, colleagues, friends, fellow Canadians, Ontarians, is that of teenagers: middle schoolers and high schoolers who were in the second bucket for a while—that is, online learning—but realized that school began to lose its meaning. There were no walls. There were no boyfriends, no girlfriends, no sports, no spirit, no standards, nothing for which to compete. Nothing physical. Everything was virtual. And I'm a teenager. The cost of exiting the second bucket and going to the catastrophic third bucket is a matter of clicking off the Zoom call and I'm out. Nobody's aware I'm out. Few people are taking attendance and they're not taking attendance fastidiously. And nobody's looking for me.

At the very moment when my juvenile narcissism requires you to look for me— Because you'll recall when you and I were all in school, we knew of some kids who wanted to drop out, they'd announce it a month beforehand, "I'm dropping out." And you'd get five people crowding that person saying, "Don't leave, don't leave." Then the teacher would come. The boyfriend, the girlfriend would come, the friends. You'd get a hug at the door, the family would be notified, and someone would come and bring you back, most of the times.

This never happened. The cost of leaving the second bucket to the third bucket were zero, and the time period in which you're in the third bucket very, very long—especially in the teenage mind, when a month is infinitely long. Now, I wish to say clearly and I'm going to be undiplomatic, but in my world it's diplomatic: If I can forgive the initial school closures— because the entire world was improvising from March 2020 until about the spring, the northern spring, let's say even the summer of 2020—we can forgive those policy mistakes. And they were policy mistakes.

After that they became policy crimes. Because we closed when I and colleagues already were articulating, and then shouting from the skies, and then making personal calls and emails and interventions and media interventions: "Do not close the schools." This third bucket is catastrophically large. I put it to you that at the nadir of the closures, it was 200,000 kids across the country on a global student population of 5 million. Tens of thousands across Ontario. Because again, in a very degenerate way—and I repeat, I'm being diplomatic—intellectually degenerate way, we close the schools, and we close them, and we close them, and we close them.

In April of 2021, I'll never forget: the Premier said that the schools will be closed indefinitely. And my stomach plummeted. Because indefinite to us is understandable but for the teenager I describe, that has a zero-cost proposition to exit to the third bucket, indefinite means forever. There is no return proposition. Premier never said, "Hold your horses. Everyone's coming back in a couple of weeks and we want to educate you." We said, "No education in Ontario."

### **Allan Rouben**

There was no hope.

### **Dr. Irvin Studin**

There was no hope. There was no message and nobody was aware of the scale and the catastrophe, by the way, that awaited us and that now is befalling us. Because let me just put two signals—two key signals that any intelligent society would have understood—to not go down that path of deep school closures.

One, the third bucket kids will live miserably.

[00:15:00]

As a rule. There will be some exceptions. They will live miserably because they're undereducated, or uneducated in a world that is far more cruel and that needs, in many cases, over preparation. We've underprepared them and then we feed them to the wolves in this society that is post-pandemic. That is our fault. That is a crime of policy. What have we done? And now, as a collective, what have we done to the country? What kind of society and country? An intelligent country, one in which I'm proud to be a citizen, which I adored in my childhood, and one that I thought was the best place to inhabit as a child. I have a family of three children. What awaits is huge destabilization because these third bucket kids will become adults five, ten years from now.

And how will we live? We'll have a huge contingent of people who are uneducated, undereducated and will hit us upside the head and we'll say, "Oh my God, what have we done?" And they will in turn ask, "Why did you do that?" And I do not accept that these are bad kids or marginalized kids or they're from certain minorities. Not at all. I repeat: the child in Mumbai in India who could have been a physics star when the school closed could have gone and been married off. And that happened in huge numbers in India. But the same child here who was a soccer star or a bright light in English or mathematics that went home to an abusive home and for whom school lost all meaning—and there are plenty such stories—is also a third bucket child.

And they will look back and say, "I was on my way and you collapsed my childhood. And then you collapsed your future."

I'm here to deliver the message to say, this is what happened. It happened in huge quanta. It happened in one of the most civilized countries in the world. We owe a debt to these young people to find them and bring them back to school. I repeat, find them and bring them back to school and educate them properly. And the second is to never again, for the rest of the century, repeat that degenerate mistake of public policy. Never.

Those are the key to-dos, imperatives, that I wish to impart on this distinguished inquiry. And I thank you for putting it together.

### **Allan Rouben**

Thank you for coming. Let me ask you, in terms of collection of the data for this third bucket, explain to us how you go about that.

### **Dr. Irvin Studin**

Well, there are two ways. And the data are completely unofficial because they are not collected. And if they were collected, it would redound to the huge embarrassment of government, naturally. "What do you mean, we failed to educate?" "Ontario had no education in particular." "Come to Ontario, we promise not to educate your child."

The number is based on first of all, an indigenous—that is not "Aboriginal" indigenous—an indigenous calculation for Canada on the number of possibly-ousted children as soon as schools go online. Add to that different coefficients on abusive homes, on disabilities, on houses without English or French—and then we quickly get across the global student population of Canada, where Ontario has 2 million of the 5 million total student body of the

country, to a number of 200,000 in about January of 2021. It would have reduced as the schools began to open. But I maintain, it still is in the tens of thousands because our American colleagues had it in the millions. And on a 10 to 1 ratio, we then could triangulate. The U.K. had very similar numbers to us in terms of basic ouster but their school closures were not as long, so they're slightly smaller than us. And other countries without internet access, as soon as you went into the second bucket, had huge numbers. I'm talking about South Asia, parts of Africa, parts of Latin America.

But I wish to say, colleagues: I have First World colleagues on this commission who look at us in Canada as if we're Martian. "What do you mean you have failed to educate your children during the pandemic?" I say, "How many kids have you got in the third bucket?" They say, "Zero."

[00:20:00]

"How about you guys?" "Well, we have tens of thousands." How did this happen?

Well, first of all, we closed the schools for catastrophically long periods. Secondly, the norm of compulsory schooling and attendance collapsed. As soon as we went online, all those norms went out the window. And by the way, they are out the window in many cases still. Because within the second bucket—and I wish to address that quickly as well—within the virtual schooling world, the attendance norms were very, very variable.

And the final thing is that intelligent decision-makers understood that as soon as they closed the schools, there would be leakage from the school system. And you've got to plug that leakage quickly. And we didn't understand that. We were tweeting, tweeting, tweeting, and the school-closers—particularly the medical officers who were closing schools like it was going out of style—became online sensations. They were apparently saving our children and they were saving us.

And when we go back in time, when we go back and look on it, I wish for us to look at school-closers as a shameful category of decision-maker. You're a school-closer. You send children to misery. The schools should remain open always. Always, always, always, unless there's a foreign army at the gates. It's that central. We now understand it's that central, not just to the well-being of the child but to the functioning and survival of the society.

There are other countries that continued to educate their children, or even over-educate their children, during the pandemic. Their children will meet our children in life 10 years from now. And who will do better? And who will deserve to do better?

The second bucket: huge under-education for everyone else who stayed in the schooling system, who didn't collapse to the third bucket. Collapse of ambition, collapse of spirit, collapse of social interaction, socialization. You could be a child of wealth or of poverty in Ontario and Canada and go to any school and by and large, the final product is predictable: undereducation. Then you open the schools and the undereducation continues because we open the schools with low energy.

My final to-do is that within the schooling system that we've reopened, outside of the third bucket, for everyone who's remained: energy, energy, energy. We must overeducate the kids for all the learning that was lost on our watch. Because again, we're preparing them for something or we're not, or we're failing to prepare them. We're in a low-energy state right now. The schools are low-energy. The standards are low. We need to overcompensate. So that's the third to-do and that's a leadership question at the principal level, at the board

level, at the level of minister and deputy minister. Go, go, go. That's how a smart society behaves in reaction to the regress of the last two or three years.

**Allan Rouben**

You said that you and some of your colleagues were sounding the alarm. Tell us a little bit about that. And what does it say that that wasn't front and center in media and public discussion during that time period?

**Dr. Irvin Studin**

Can I be blunt? It means that the Canada that loved its children in my childhood is not such under pressure. Canada does not love its children under pressure. A captain of a ship— My wife gave me this example during the pandemic when, to my horror, I started appreciating the scale of this catastrophe. She said a captain, a leader, in the context of catastrophe puts his passengers and the young people to safety. He doesn't allow them to wallow in misery or allow them to feel his or her tension.

We did the opposite. We immersed the children in misery, in our own fears and our anxieties. We didn't save them. And in failing to save them, we haven't secured our future. So the message is: if we really want to be a country that loves its children, as I do—I love young people, I work with young people, not just my own children—we have to take the lessons of this period to heart for the rest of the century, if we make it that long. And we have to do right by those we've harmed in the last two or three years.

[00:25:00]

So I don't accept that this is a lost generation at all. That's Twitter-speak.

If we're a serious country, we say we made a mistake. The answer to a mistake in my world is remedy: immediate remedy. Find these kids. They're easily findable. They're on the attendance rosters across the schools and all the boards across the country. Find them, get them back to school, educate them, get them caught up, and some of them will be Nobel Prize winners. Failing which, we only have ourselves to blame. Many of them will end miserably and their misery will redound to the collective misery.

In terms of the leadership class: unfortunately, the pandemic proved that we have by and large, an accidental leadership class. Canada operates at all levels, across all parties, in all jurisdictions, with a transactional leadership class that presides over a system that's been built over a century and a half. A beautiful system. And when it collapsed, we didn't have the talent and the energy to resuscitate it.

That leadership class is still in place. Nothing's happened. No one's resigned. No one's gone to jail. There's no *mea culpa*. I've heard not a single speech, not a single speech by any leader across Canada saying, "Here are the major lessons of the pandemic, including in education." There is some revolutionary work happening in Alberta, but that's a separate point.

**Allan Rouben**

Have you heard any acknowledgement from any public official that acknowledges the consequences that you talk about?

**Dr. Irvin Studin**

There's been no public articulation of this tragedy. Because renormalization was a matter of simply opening the schools. We just opened the schools, so everything's back to normal. Imagine that every child with his or her lunch is back to school. They were just watching Netflix, I guess, for two years. But remember, a childhood is a limited period. So what you and I appreciate is two years of difficulty, for the child, is an irreversible passage of time. You're either educated in that period or you're not. And if your education collapses and life passes you by, you can't get caught up. That's the other thing we don't realize.

A child— I'll put a very concrete example to you. We get a call from British Columbia on the commission, earliest days. A grandmother says, "I have two brilliant children. They're stuck in the basement playing video games because the parents are in a COVID panic. They don't want them to leave. Everyone's going to die." And for two years, they were in the basement not being educated. And I didn't know the age of the children, let's say the child was 13 years old. And the world opens up and he or she is 15 or 16 years old, but with a 13-year-old education. And now scale that across the thousands, tens of thousands.

How does the system react to that? It's not reacting at all. We just said, "The schools are open," with low energy. "Everybody wear a mask, be safe, be vaccinated, zombie about." Not, "Let's go—we got a national mission to catch up." Not that. We're in defensive posture. So the child either never gets caught up, doesn't go back to school, or the general misery continues. And those stories are legion. Those stories are legion.

**Allan Rouben**

You obviously have a very high profile. You've been in the government, highly educated. What was the reaction from policy-makers when you were bringing this to their attention, when all this was going on?

**Dr. Irvin Studin**

I'm not going to impart educational lessons from my own story. I will impart sports stories because I was a good student but I was a very good athlete too—notwithstanding my present composition. I was a good soccer player. And I always say: in elite sport, there are nice people and then there are people you want to have on your team when the going gets tough. I think everyone understands that analogy. They're nice people when the going is generally good. Not on a rainy day.

[00:30:00]

And Canada is full of them. And in the leadership class, we're full of them. Too many were pretenders when the proverbial thing hit the fan. And I got to understand that personally because I was speaking to many of them. I said, "Where's the reaction?" The only responsible reaction from anyone overseeing any decision-making part of the education system—or the children's welfare system, or the childhoods of our young people—the only responsible reaction would have been, "Oh my God, reverse this mistake. Don't repeat it." Ours were the exact opposite.

I got stories from top decision-makers saying, "Irvin, I can't do this. I'm too busy with my own family. I've got to help my kids." These are top decision-makers. "Irvin, we have to close the schools. Full stop. There are other things at play that are more important, symbolic, medical issues. Twitter." Twitter fame is a big one. And the third category was complete intellectual incomprehension. We just could not go there. We couldn't imagine

what happens to our own children when we close the schools. We still cannot go there. We cannot accept that this has happened or we've done this. It's foreign.

That's why I say, of the 60 countries or so on the commission I chair, countries like India, Argentina, Jamaica, they get it. They live more at the cold face of life and death, even their children. But more advanced countries—U.K., Canada in particular—we can't go there. What I described in Dickens in the discussion between Pip and Joe is foreign but we've consigned many of our kids to the Dickensian condition. We've done it. These are acts of omission or commission, repeated, repeated, at length.

**Allan Rouben**

I have to say that the failure of leadership that you're describing is extremely discouraging.

**Dr. Irvin Studin**

I think that's diplomatic. I think that's diplomatic. I think we'll look back and say, "There were policy crimes that were committed." And that's a category that I— This is not under criminal law. These are policy crimes because first, they were problems of understanding, then problems of competence and, in the end, conspicuous acts that redounded to the harm of our children. And in all catastrophes, usually in wars over the centuries, you go back and say, "Well, what are the major lessons learned?" So the Geneva Conventions would have been born in the late 19th, 20th century, responding to things like chemical weapons and civil population rights. Those are lessons learned over the catastrophe of war.

Well, what's the lesson of the pandemic? The number one lesson: Never close the bloody schools, ever, never. I'm against closing them now on a snow day. Do not close them. People die as soon as you do. You don't believe it. They die. We must stop looking at our children as little munchkins, cute munchkins with lunchboxes that we're babying and worshipping in their cutest years. We owe them a duty of preparation. Beyond that worship of their beauty, we owe them a duty of preparation for tomorrow. I had that. I profited from that in Canada. I'm educated in the public schools of Canada—proudly. And I look back and say, "How could this have happened?" We destroyed something in an instant that was a huge achievement, a huge achievement. We regularized beautiful childhoods across Canada over many decades—with many exceptions, granted—but that was a regular system. And now we've regularized misery.

**Allan Rouben**

I'm going to ask the commissioners if they have any questions for you.

**Commissioner Kaikkonen**

Thank you for your testimony. I have a couple of questions.

[00:35:00]

I know that many of the school boards in Ontario have said, or at least suggested, that the reason they've abdicated their responsibility to the students is because they were dictated to by the health orders that came down from their particularly local health officers, and then by default the Minister and Ministry of Education, and then further, Doug Ford. What would you say to that?

**Dr. Irvin Studin**

Yes and no. In my earliest—I have a trilogy of calls for resignation in a number of articles publicly. My first one was for the resignation of all of the officers of medical health across Ontario for the reason of the school closures. There are other reasons, but that's for other testimony. But who was resisting? There were many protests. There were many attempts at public interventions. And I'm not talking about social media. I'm talking about physical protests, calling en masse. I cannot think of a single school board that heroically went against this, what I call "mania," this mania of closures.

It was a mania in the end. It wasn't conscious wisdom or anything like conscientious wisdom. Name me one school board where there was a strong voice saying, "We keep our schools open." Everyone fell into line or colluded with the mania. A mania, by the way, which was completely foreign. It was a mania. But this was a period of mania that was not foreign, it's not foreign to other societies. Ours had a different look, but it was very much a mania. All of them fell into line with that energy.

The school boards are just as guilty of a failure of leadership or duty vis-a-vis the children as are the medical officers of health, for sure. The only reason I would say that the school boards have a conspicuous responsibility is that they know something about the education system. Whereas all of the medical officers of health—I've spoken with many of them, I've lambasted many of them, I spoke with many of them on the phone, I corresponded—were people of average intellect who were completely accidental, who knew nothing about the education systems they were closing. At all. And wanted to know nothing about the consequences because it was complete abstraction.

This was a matter of a button. "We close the schools." Tens of thousands of applause: dah, dah, dah, dah. "And I'm closing my schools here." "And I'm closing my schools in Peel," "And I'm closing my schools in York." Who's next? And I'm just looking at the horror because I'm counting, first of all, the number of third buckets that result from that, the general undereducation, and the ease with which we put kids in a position of conspicuous misery.

**Commissioner Kaikkonen**

Thank you. My second question is about the move by school boards to go to the standardized tests that are post-COVID and use that as their standard for going forward in education. Do you have any thoughts on that?

**Dr. Irvin Studin**

I have no view on the standardized testing. I don't think it will get us anywhere one way or the other. My brief is for high energy.

You imagine that Canada was here before the pandemic across the systems in education, in business, in the social sector, national unity, internationally. And then we collapsed to here, okay? And when we reopened, we stayed here. We're here. We imagine intellectually we're here [highest], but the reality is we're here [lowest]. The only way we can get back up here is energy, energy, energy. That's the gap and you feel it around. People are driving more slowly, thinking more slowly. The news is more sombre. The politicians are less energetic.

And, of course, with the kids: The kids are less sharp. They're more depressed. They're less knowledgeable by far than we were in our generation. By far. I deal with them all the time, some of the bright ones. The only way to get back is not through one standardized test. It's energy, energy, energy. Educate them to the nines, for the next several years.

The only small brief I've added is that we should, where possible, add an additional year of schooling. Because they haven't had enough time to incubate before they go to post-secondary, or the work world, or vocational school. So the Grade 13 would have been an obvious thing—something they did in Jamaica. We could easily do that, but we don't think that way. We just open it up and it's status quo but it's status quo at a low energy. So we're graduating low energy people to a world that requires that much more. The gap is a gap of misery.

[00:40:00]

So energy, energy, energy. That's my only brief.

**Commissioner Kaikkonen**

Have you sent any of this information to or contacted them with your concerns—either the education minister, Lecce, or the school boards independently in this province?

**Dr. Irvin Studin**

Yes.

**Commissioner Kaikkonen**

And have you received a response from anyone?

**Dr. Irvin Studin**

In deeds, no. In deeds, no. In explicit terms, no. But implicitly there's an appreciation. It's just the gap between the appreciation and the action is huge because it's a mammoth task. We would have to go out and find these kids and then we'd have to educate everyone energetically. That's much more difficult than throwing \$200 million—I don't know, \$20 million to \$100 million—and saying, "That's our catch-up budget." It's very modest, I don't remember: a few hundred bucks per family for tutoring. Right? So that is the failure again in adult responsibility.

Let me just also refine a point. In January of 2022, it was one of the darkest professional periods of my life, where I was at a protest against school closures. The schools were closed once again, January 2022. They were closed again and we were at Queen's Park and five people showed up. And I swear at that point the Premier could have said, "Ontario doesn't do education, we're just cancelling that," and no one would have blinked.

There was no resistance. Because we were in a manic mode. It's a completely foreign intellectual condition, psychological condition. I don't believe that the right to education is enough. We have a duty; there's an adult duty. And why do I say that? I believe in rights first and foremost, but the rights are of the child. The child has a right to education. But if you take it away, is it for the child to litigate his or her rights? Who takes away the right to educate? The adult. Well, what's the role of the adult? The adult has a duty.

So the duty to educate is first and foremost. It's primary. And it falls on the adults. The right is for the child. Those two things live side by side but the duty is primary because we're adults. We failed our adult duty. So we failed. Very well. The adult responsibility, the adult reaction, a non-pretender reaction, is: "Oh my God, mistake! Let's fix it." And that's the only

way I think we can acceptably move on as a society that's not lying to itself. I'm for that path.

**Commissioner Kaikkonen**

And my final question is about individual assessments for students. When students are declared special needs, they're given an IEP [individual education plan]. And I'm just wondering, going back into the system now, do you see an increasing number of children, students at whatever age group it is, that will be labeled as special needs as a consequence of the two years of education they've lost?

**Dr. Irvin Studin**

I don't have that data.

**Commissioner Kaikkonen**

It's good data to look up.

**Dr. Irvin Studin**

I don't have that data. What I want to say is this: I presume, on the logic that there are all sorts of conditions that would have obtained and occurred over the course of those two or three years of second bucket, third bucket, undereducation, no education. Huge. And I imagine mental health is an important part of the Inquiry. But as I said, with duty being prior to rights: education is prior to mental health.

Do not give a child who has no education or undereducation mental health services or therapy. Give him or her an education. The mental health will come with an education. But a child who has no education is not looking for mental health services. Let us stop fetishizing that. He or she is looking for an education. The mental health part comes with an advanced society's services. We're not here to pooh-pooh our children and say, "Are you feeling okay as you come back to school?" Educate, educate, educate. They're resilient with an education, but they're not resilient without an education. So let's get that logic right as well.

**Commissioner Kaikkonen**

I agree, thank you.

[00:45:00]

**Allan Rouben**

Are there any final thoughts that you want to leave us with?

**Dr. Irvin Studin**

I still love this country. I still love this province. And I'm very grateful for having been raised here. Canada gave me a beautiful childhood. And I really struggled in accepting—starting with my own children, for other children—that we could have devastated beautiful childhoods with such levity. And my last two or three years, with many other colleagues,

have been spent fighting for what I think is the best look of Canada and a proper childhood in Canada. Not wealthy, not poor, just a proper childhood that prepares you.

I want to reinstate that. Canada is a beautiful place in which to be a child, in which to have a childhood, in which to move if you're from out of Canada, to raise children. But that requires work. We cannot tell ourselves stories. So we have a huge burden. But I want to say that if we put that work in—and it is work—we can bring light again to the children of the country. Because right now the picture can be very dark. And it offends me. And that's part of my—I'm not very sentimental but it offended me that we could have brought such darkness to otherwise regular children so quickly. And again, to open up the darkness is work, work, work. Work on the back of honesty. That's it.

**Allan Rouben**

Thank you very much.

[00:47:12]



***Final Review and Approval:*** Jodi Bruhn, August 16, 2023.

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