

Public Hearing on the Continuity of Learning Plan 4.0
Virtual Special Called School Board Meeting
July 10, 2020
Comments from Christina Bohringer

Good afternoon Madam Chair, members of the School Board, Dr. Hutchings and the larger ACPS community watching/listening online.

My name is Christina Bohringer, I am an Alexandria resident and lifelong educator at Samuel W. Tucker Elementary School for the last amazing 16 years. I am a member of the Education Association of Alexandria, serve on the VEA Board and am an NEA Director for the National Education Association.

After listening to last night's public hearing with only 2 speakers, I felt I needed to speak today.

Let me start by saying unequivocally that I want to be in my first grade classroom in the Fall, but #onlywhenitssafe. I want to teach my first graders in the room that I would carefully prep, but #onlywhenitssafe. I want to see those yellow school buses roll up to Tucker, but #onlywhenitssafe. I miss my Tucker colleagues and want to be planning and collaborating at school, but #onlywhenitssafe.

Like many of you probably, I want to visit my parents who live far away. I haven't seen them since mid-February, because I promised myself I'd see them #onlywhenitssafe.

I know these decisions are difficult, and I know there is honestly no good solution to this massive problem. We need to be focused on ALL of our students. I know distance learning online is hard, I learned it on the fly and did it for 13 weeks and just started teaching Summer Learning online this week. I don't know a single educator who thinks this is easy for students either, we are all doing the best we can, with what we have. I know parents are having just as hard of a time getting our littles to sit still, our older ones to find that intrinsic motivation to keep learning for the sake of growing their brains and building their sense of self. But we need to remember that we are all in this together.

ANY plan that has children and staff in our school buildings must ENSURE the safety of everyone. If you are going to have educators and other building staff return to schools, then you must provide proper PPE for each of us, every day. Can you ensure that every school will have enough soap, paper towels, hand sanitizer, and the proper cleaning products and materials for custodians to keep our buildings safe? Because I remember the cleaning lists that were posted in classrooms during H1N1, and even though my building custodians are amazing, that list is near impossible to get done with the staff we have. If you are going to have students return to schools, there must be 6' of social distancing on school buses and in classrooms, and when age appropriate, I would want face masks required as well. Yes, I know it is hard to keep masks on and not touch our faces, I still struggle with it. To be honest, I think I've made it as long as 3 hours with my mask on. I understand the reality of lunch in classrooms...who will supervise that while I am taking my 30 minute lunch? Can you imagine a 6 year old having lunch in the classroom not sitting with friends and probably minimal talking because you are all 6' apart? But I caution you, I warn you, I implore you and everyone listening to *really* consider what school will look like for your little one. School as we knew it, is gone for the foreseeable future. I know our kids need to see each other. I know face to face instruction is best...but asking me and every other educator to choose between our job and our health and the health of our families, is unconscionable. I will happily go back to school, but #onlywhenitssafe.