

Public Comments

6/21/2018

Emily Carlsen

Good evening,

My name is Emily Carlsen and I am speaking on behalf of Matthew Maury Elementary PTA. First off, I would like to commend the Board for taking such quick action in developing policy recommendations pursuant to **Virginia General Assembly (HB1419)**.

We appreciate your responsiveness on this issue and your efforts and coordination in adopting this policy in advance of the 2018-2019 calendar school year. This is certainly a priority in the ACPS parent community and there is good reason for this – our children. It is a rare occasion where a parent is not given the play-by-play on what happened at recess, and we can certainly count on being informed when it has not taken place.

I urge the Board to adopt a policy of a thirty minute minimum recess as a pilot program for the next year. By setting the allotted recess time to thirty minutes minimum, principals will be allowed the flexibility to schedule the school day according to the school administration's needs while the children enjoy the benefits of an increased recess – (1) more physical activity; (2) more opportunities to develop and strengthen peer relationships and engage in conflict resolution; (3) increased focus and concentration while inside the classroom just to name a few –

I would further urge the Board to reassess this policy next year to identify successes and use those success stories to develop best practices throughout ACPS. To that end, we encourage ACPS to solicit the help of principals in documenting changes to their instructional blocks and any associated benefits or repercussions. If the data shows that particular schools are hitting their standards of learning targets, experiencing fewer behavioral outburst, for example, we need to think critically as a district about how to implement these practices across the board.

While we applaud the Board for taking this major first step in developing a policy of a minimum of thirty minute recess, I would urge the Board and incoming Superintendent Dr. Hutchings, Jr. to view this measure as a catalyst for more innovation with respect to health and wellness within ACPS. It is critical that we continue to provide time for our children for physical activity, particularly at Maury where children are allotted physical education only twice a week. I have spoken with many different parents in the Maury community as well as other ACPS schools such as Charles Barrett, Macarthur, MV, and Polk and we are unified in our desire to expand opportunities to incorporate physical activity, movement and mindfulness into instruction. At John Adams, for example, they partnered with Running Brooke (a local nonprofit organization) and took “brain boost” breaks that incorporated physical activity with mathematics curriculum such as identifying and developing patterns. ACPS could expand upon their interpretation of **HB1419 to partner physical activity and PBIS, and offer students additional opportunities to move as an incentive and reward for good behavior and citizenship. In short, we as a community can identify more opportunities to move.** In a galvanizing moment such as this ACPS, has the opportunity to use this critical mass of support to expand these types of opportunities and be a leader when it comes to the health and wellness of our children.

For many of our children, lack of movement represents a true health crisis. To put things in perspective, recess may be the only opportunity some kids have for movement each day – many of whom live in

public housing across from this building complex. Our underserved children are living in apartments and may not have a place to move inside the home, or a safe place to play outside of the home. This is a tragedy not just in terms of the physical side effects – obesity and chronic disease are linked to lack of physical activity – but also in terms of mental health. Lack of physical movement is associated with increased anxiety and depression just to name a few mental and emotional side effects. Our most vulnerable population is in desperate need of not just the thirty minutes of recess but also increased movement and mindfulness throughout the day.

In short, I thank you for taking this significant first step today and urge you to consider this as the first of many steps in caring for the physical and emotional wellbeing of our school children.

Sincerely,

Emily Carlsen
PTA President
Matthew Maury Elementary School