

Virtual School Board Meeting

April 8, 2021

Virtual Public Comments by Erika Melman

Good evening, thank you for the opportunity to speak. I'm here tonight to express my displeasure with ACPS's announcement yesterday about plans for the remainder of the school year, that is, to retain 6 ft distancing and not expand from 2 to 4 days a week of hybrid learning. When I read the email, I was furious as I thought about how much my second grade ACPS student has suffered and struggled with virtual learning. I also started thinking back to something Dr. Hutchings said at a past school board meeting. He remarked that when you think about how complicated school operations such as food distribution, transportation, staffing, and switching classrooms is, that operating in any way other than at a limited capacity seemed impossible.

I thought about the word impossible all night.

Last March, like ACPS, my 4th grader's non-ACPS school closed. That's where the similarities between how my family experienced pandemic schooling ended. Communication from the non-ACPS school was frequent and included a timeline for re-opening in-person in the fall. I never heard the word impossible.

I thought about work. Due to the pandemic, operations for a program that I work on to serve vulnerable populations was significantly disrupted last March. We found out that we would have to do twice as much work in half the usual time to meet our milestones and provide benefits to consumers. Hundreds of stakeholders re-engineered their operations. No one uttered the word impossible.

My ask tonight is that ACPS pivot away from the 'impossible' mind-set and make a plan to improve the status quo now. I think the right move is to reduce spacing to 3 feet. However, if you want to stick with 6 feet, do it, but also determine how much additional capacity you need to serve all students who want to move from virtual to hybrid now, and to move all hybrid students from 2 days a week to 4 now. 5 days a week in-person for all students who want it next fall should not even be in question. Federal money is available for expanding capacity and operations. When I asked the Mayor during his last Town Hall, ACPS had not yet requested any funding from the City Council. Leaving that money on the table while students, parents, and the community is suffering is unconscionable. One tagline of the pandemic has been, 'Together, Apart'. With vaccines and the backing of science, let's change the tagline to 'Together, with 3 feet between'