

Public Comments

December 17, 2020 School Board Meeting

Comments by Jennifer Niccolls

Thank you for serving on the ACPS school board. It's challenging in the best of times.

I want to start by acknowledging the incredible work Charles Barrett did last spring. Teachers must have worked all weekend to be ready for live instruction after school was abruptly closed on March 6. My daughter's teacher hit the ground running that Monday and persevered through the end of second grade. Ms. Kaplan even found time to have lunch bunches with my daughter as an extra layer of motivation.

However, this school year has been a challenge and I am extremely disappointed by the lack of urgency conveyed by the ACPS leadership to return students to in person learning. Given that day care and recreation programs are operating safely in school buildings, students should be in actual classrooms, with teachers. I am very disappointed that ACPS has moved so slowly to return students to in person learning. Students are losing so much learning this year.

While I have not watched every Board meeting, I have watched several and I do not feel any urgency from the superintendent or Board to return kids to school. I beg you, bring our students back. Find a way to open the buildings, use every available space, as soon as possible.

Distance learning is a horrible substitute for in person learning. An example? My daughter's teacher presented a wonderful lesson on reading nonfiction text. My daughter was kicked out multiple times, ultimately missing the lesson. Because there are no recordings, there was no way for my daughter to experience that learning. Another example? My daughter often participates in a small group for math instruction. She is generally introverted. The other kids in her group are not – the learning is highly impacted by how often the other students talk. While this also happens during in person learning, teachers are much better equipped to minimize those interruptions and ensure all students are learning when teaching **in person**.

One solution to technology problems? Record whole group lessons for academic areas and post the files. I've asked for this, but the principal said there are privacy concerns. Please, re consider recording whole group lessons. I appreciate privacy concerns, but really, by requiring all students to leave cameras on, we have a window into the homes of my daughter's classmates already.

I have some requests I hope you'll consider.

Please make no changes to the school calendar. Please do not make early release days completely synchronous as happened in November. If students cannot have in person learning, they must have live instruction.

Please, ACPS must offer summer instruction for students again. We need as much instruction as possible for our kids to recover from this school year.

Please, do not take precious instructional time away from teachers and students as you did when the superintendent and a doctor held sessions with students about mask wearing and hand washing a few weeks ago. Teachers and parents are well equipped to teach students this sort of thing.

Thank you.