

Public Comments for Virtual School Board Meetings #169

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Topic *	Virtual Learning
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What is your relationship to ACPS? *	Staff Member
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Good Evening,

I am writing in regard to the discussion on opening schools in ACPS. I just attended the virtual town hall with District B school board representatives. It seemed like the loudest and most present voices in the meeting were calling for return to school. I feel that it is important to contribute my thoughts as a contrasting point of view that was underrepresented in the meeting.

I have been teaching at George Mason Elementary school for 11 years. I want to start off emphasizing that I love my job, I love my students, and I am heartbroken to be separated from the George Mason Band experience this year. As much as I miss being in the classroom and having that in-person connection with the students, I care for the safety of my students, colleagues, and members of the community more.

COVID 19 is a novel virus. Our understanding of how it spreads, incubates, and expresses is evolving. There are concerns with what we know and with what remains unknown about this virus.

What we know:

- It is contagious and deadly. With 73 deaths and counting in Alexandria alone.
- It has lasting impact for those infected. More than a third appear to have significant lasting physical impact from the virus.
- It is not under control. Rates have recently risen in our immediate geographical area.
- Children can contract and pass the virus, even if they do not express symptoms. Children as young as 9 transmit the virus at the same rate as adults.
- Children can become extremely ill and die from this virus.
- Asymptomatic carriers can transmit the virus for up to two weeks
- At least 5 cases have been reported in which the same person has been infected more than once.
- The virus can remain active on surfaces for extended periods.
- The virus can be passed through droplets, which can be controlled if mask wearing is done continuously and correctly while people are in close contact.
- The virus can be transmitted through airborne aerosol particles, which are not contained by masks. Recent evidence suggests that aerosol accumulation may be the primary way that infection is passed.

What we don't yet know:

- How to effectively prevent aerosol accumulation and airborne spread of the virus in a school building.
- How much virus exposure (amount of particles, duration) is needed to spur an infection.
- What impact this virus may have on children's future health. Many viruses have impact later in life, even if the initial infection is mild. This is a virus that seems to have lasting impact. We do not know that widespread infection would mean for children as they age.
- Exactly what factors are contributing to the fall and rise in rates. Because the containment, precaution, and data collecting policies have differed so widely within and between communities, we don't actually have good data on how this virus is currently evolving and spreading.
- Why one person has a mild case and another person has a fatal case. comorbidities and pre-existing conditions cannot account for all of the variation.

What does this mean for the return to school:

We cannot return to school in-person without jeopardizing the health and safety of all involved. If droplet transmission was the only way the virus could pass from one person to another, we would be relying on a whole lot of humans, many of whom are still developing, to keep a mask on all day long. From my brief working hours on-site this summer, I have observed that continuous, properly positioned mask wearing is not something even the fully adult building staff could maintain effectively. With the added risk of aerosol accumulation in classrooms, we are even more poorly equipped to prevent virus spread. If we return to school in person at this time, when rates are rising, when we do not know how to prevent this virus effectively in a school environment, when we do not know the full impact of the virus, and when we do not know how to predict the severity of infection, we are saying that kids being in a traditional in-person school setting is more important than the lives of the students and staff. If one student dies, if one staff member dies, if the school community has to cope with those illnesses and deaths, the return to school will not have been worth it.

Yes, virtual school has been difficult. It is hard for teachers; it is hard for students; it is hard for families. I could write about our successes. We have them. I am connecting with students. 100% of our 4th and 5th graders have instruments and are learning them at home. Our groups make gains every lesson. We are making music together in our weird new way. It is not ideal. I do not pretend that it is. I do not believe that a return to school in pods and masks, not touching, and with no real opportunity to actively engage with peers would be ideal either. But I strongly believe that a not-ideal year of school (especially when almost everyone in the country is having a similarly not-ideal year) is not going to ruin a child's learning career. The death of a classmate? The death of a teacher? The experience of being the carrier of a virus that kills or

makes chronically ill a family member? We should not be contemplating a schooling solution that puts our students in the position to experience any of those things. We should not be considering the lives of our teachers and staff members a reasonable sacrifice in the risk-benefit analysis.

Let's focus on making virtual learning meaningful. Let's reduce the hours each child is on the screen. Let's prioritize connection and emotional health. Let's find creative ways to relieve stress of families and students. Let's keep everyone safe, healthy, and home.

Sincerely,

Heather Rosner

George Mason Elementary School Band Teacher