February 17, 2022

Dear School Board,

My name is Camille Galdes and I’m speaking on behalf of Arlington Parents for Education.

The CDC changed isolation guidelines because people infected with COVID-19 are very unlikely to infect others by day 6 and to reduce the deleterious effects of extended time away from work and school. APS repeatedly says it’s devoted to keeping schools open. However, its refusal to reduce isolation time for recovered students—while reducing it for staff—is not in line with this value. Both CDC and VDH have explicitly said this updated isolation guidance applies to schools, and SB1303 requires schools comply with CDC “to the maximum extent practicable,” not to ***exceed*** CDC standards. APS needs to reduce isolation times immediately and give weeks of school back to hundreds of kids.

If APS’ goal is to reduce viral transmission, reducing isolation for staff but not students does not achieve that. Adults are much more likely to infect others than children since their R naught value is more than twice that of children. I strongly support the move to reduce isolation times for staff, but not extending the same to children shows it’s not based on safety.

When my 6-year-old tested positive on a Monday, he had a fever for 2 days and was back to his normal self by day 3. Per the updated guidance, he should have been able to attend school the following Monday. Instead, he could not rejoin his class until the next Friday (for one day, before another weekend). His younger brother quarantined for a week, then tested positive on the weekend. With zero symptoms, he was then barred from school for 11 more days. He was out January 11th - 26th but should have been able to return the 21st. Two weeks is literally inconceivable to a 3-year-old—I wasn’t sure he’d remember his classmates’ names when he returned.

These quarantine and isolation times add up very quickly. When an asymptomatic preschooler is barred from school for the equivalent of a winter break, you know you have a problem.

I’ve been told APS is violating these recommendations because recovered children would need to take masks off at lunch. Do you think CDC has not considered this? All universal masking programs include breaks at lunch, and school districts around the country don’t view lunch as an impediment to the new guidance, including our neighbor Falls Church City.

It’s time for APS to provide recovered students with a fair return-to-school path recommended by the medical bodies it purports to trust. Please, **KEEP SCHOOLS OPEN** for recovered students.