

STATEMENT

February 16, 2022

Fairfax County Parents Association (FCPA)

www.FairfaxParents.org

info@fairfaxparents.org



New Virginia Law Puts Children First

(Fairfax, VA) – The Fairfax County Parents Association (FCPA) celebrates the passage of SB739, a bipartisan bill signed into law today in Richmond. SB739 enshrines in Virginia law a requirement that school systems provide students with access to in-person education during the entirety of every school year and empowers parents to make choices about whether to require their children to continue masking.

The in-person education requirement ensures that Virginia's children will not be forced into one-size-fits-all virtual “learning” and denied access to the in-person education that is their right, and that school systems must provide. Over the past two years it has become apparent to all—though our parents understood it by the summer of 2020—how academically and emotionally damaging forced virtual school was for most students. We are pleased that the Commonwealth is prioritizing the needs of children with SB739 and establishing a statewide baseline expectation that all school districts provide children with the in-person learning they need to thrive.

We know that masking or unmasking school children continues to be a very controversial issue in some areas of the country. Yet, our parents believe that each family is better situated to assess the risk tolerance and socio-emotional health needs of their children than school system bureaucrats who cannot possibly be expected to understand the individual needs of children in this vast school system. We appreciate efforts by lawmakers in Richmond, especially Senators Siobhan Dunnivant and Chap Petersen, Speaker Todd Gilbert, and Delegate Amanda Batten to address the need for school systems to include parents in the process of deciding whether their children continue to be forced to mask. With science increasingly showing that forced masking of children has a negligible effect on community transmission of COVID, yet contributes to other harmful impacts for developing children, and that one-way masking and vaccines provide ample protection for those that want it, we strongly believe it is time to allow families to assess continued masking based on their child's specific needs and challenges.

These issues could not have been resolved without dedicated efforts by parents, and lawmakers in Richmond. While other levels of our Fairfax County bureaucracy now complain about their fiefdoms being challenged by actions taken in the General Assembly, the reality is that families and students spent two years begging the levels of local government for leadership on these issues. Begging for a recognition of harms happening to many children before their eyes, and a clear plan to stop those harms and address the impacts. Instead, parents received constant insistence that there was either nothing they could do about it, or constant finger-pointing about why they couldn't make a decision. Local leadership knowingly failed thousands of Fairfax County students. Given that, parents underscore our appreciation for our General Assembly, Governor Youngkin—who committed to giving parents a voice in decisions impacting their children—and Governor Northam, who—faced in 2021 with irritation from his traditional supporter base for doing so—signed the initial SB1303 that gave kids back guaranteed access to in-person school this school year. Parents in our group come from across the political spectrum, and we appreciate the bipartisan nature of the efforts in Richmond over these two years to step in to stop the madness and recognize the key role adults have in society to do all that we can to prioritize the best interests of children first.

Fairfax County Parents Association (FCPA) is a volunteer-led, non-partisan, grassroots coalition of over 2,400 parents who came together as #OpenFCPS starting in June 2020 to advocate for a choice to return to in-person education in Fairfax County Public Schools. The group's participants include parents from all areas of Fairfax County who come from across the political spectrum, cultural backgrounds, and economic strata. The group advocates for student-focused, student-prioritized implementation of education and education policies in Fairfax County, VA.