

PRESS RELEASE

October 1, 2021

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FCPS Unnecessarily Keeps Healthy Kids Out of School – Test and Stay is the Solution

(Fairfax, VA)— The evidence is overwhelming that keeping students home instead of in school has caused significant learning loss. Yet instead of working to ensure kids are back in school, FCPS continues to hold fast to a 14-day quarantine period for contacts of positive COVID cases. Every week that FCPS delays changing this policy, the number of healthy, quarantined children (already in the thousands) expands dramatically, creating a third year of disrupted learning for children and causing unsustainable burdens on parents and teachers.

FCPS should follow the example of our neighbors in Montgomery County and Arlington County (and many other areas of the United States and Europe) that use testing to keep healthy children in school. In Montgomery County, when a positive case is identified, the contacts are offered the option of rapid testing and symptom monitoring at school instead of quarantine. Healthy kids, which are the vast majority of so-called “close contacts,” can continue in-person learning while the rapid tests help prevent any further spread, eliminating unnecessary missed school. At a minimum, Fairfax County should follow the example of Arlington County, where unvaccinated students can return to school with a negative PCR test that is administered after day 5 from the date of last exposure. This alone would cut the unnecessary time away from school in half.

The available science firmly supports the reasonableness of adopting such a policy. A study in the United Kingdom showed that in-school COVID spread was similar in schools quarantining contacts and in those using this “test-to-stay” method. The number of in-person instructional days salvaged was immense. In a recent Massachusetts study, test-to-stay was found to have saved approximately 6,677 in-person days in one week alone.

Mired in bureaucratic inertia and relying on false assumptions, FCPS refuses to change its outdated policy. First, and astoundingly, the FCPS leadership does not understand its own authority. Last year they ignored the Fairfax County Health Department (FCHD) guidance telling them to open schools for in-person learning. This year, however, FCPS has apparently forgotten that it determines operations policies, not the health department. Second, FCHD relies on data that falsely assumes all quarantined students are COVID-infected. In fact, data shows that number is actually extremely low: from .02% -1.6%. In addition, the risks presented by FCHD are based on a scenario where there is no diagnostic testing and the quarantined person is an adult. Both of these assumptions are wrong, as is FCHD’s faulty reliance on this data.

There is no reason for FCPS to continue deferring to a health department, whose opposition to test-to-stay is based on faulty risk assumptions coupled with a failure to understand and appreciate the burgeoning crisis created by its recommendations. The school system was given millions of dollars of CARES Act funding to get kids back in school. Virginia has the resources to conduct testing with Virginia School Screening Testing for Assurance (“ViSSTA”), but FCPS continues to ignore it. The resources are there; the students just need district leadership to stop making excuses and take action.

*The Fairfax County Parents Association seeks to ensure students are the first priority in Fairfax County Public Schools. This is accomplished by educating parents about the governance and administration of the school system and empowering parents to advocate on behalf of their children. The FCPA seeks to ensure the school board is governed in accordance with the law, specifically that the roles are non-partisan. The FCPA will work to support teachers and staff of the school system to aid their efforts to educate our children. We encourage all residents of Fairfax County, but especially parents, to stay informed and sign up for communications from the FCPA, including how to join: FairfaxParents.org