

Aug 3, 2020

To the Members of the Montgomery County Council,

We are writing to express our profound disappointment with the Montgomery County Health Officer's directive to shutter private schools and prohibit in-person instruction.

Our children's school, a religious private school, has invested much time this summer to create a safe-environment for students and staff while complying with all CDC guidelines. They have consulted with medical and legal professionals, teachers, parents, and community leaders to develop these plans. Why would the county create a blanket directive to prohibit in person learning without investigating a school's plans? This overreach of power is frightening to us and is an obstruction of our rights and freedoms.

From our children's standpoint, they are missing out on both educational and social needs by being forced to remain home. The educational experience of distance learning, despite the tremendous efforts of our school, pales in comparison to in-person learning. Additionally, attending in-person school is extremely important for the social and emotional development of children, as has been made clear by the American Academy of Pediatrics. The AAP has put forth guidelines which include statements that in person learning, especially for preschool and elementary age school children, are essential for a child's development. Our school-age children (entering kindergarten and second-grade) will be missing out on important aspects not only of their education, but also their overall physical, social, emotional, and cognitive well-being.

Moreover, unlike in March, when schools were shut down mid-year after students and teachers had already established relationships with each other, under the current proposal, students and teachers will never have the opportunity to get to know each other well which will greatly impact the quality of their education.

From a financial standpoint, having our kids at home means that only one of us can work while the other supervises and guides our kids with online learning. As a result, we will not be able to afford our children's tuition. This will either create unbearable financial strain on us or on the school who will be missing out on much needed revenue. The long-term damage of many families being unable to afford tuition could be impossible for the school to recover from and force them to close. This isn't just about what will happen for this upcoming school year, this decision impacts the future of our children and our community.

Please do not allow this directive to be approved. Please allow private schools to open.

Sincerely,

Hillel and Naomi Shaps

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