

November 4, 2020

Montgomery County Council Members:

I am writing regarding Section 6B of Montgomery County Executive Order 122-20. The item on the Council's Agenda is to remain in Phase 2 and to maintain current group size for child care centers. As an owner of a preschool/child care center in Montgomery County operating under the brand name "The Goddard School," we urge the Council to return group sizes for three and four year olds to COMAR-licensed capacity.

We make this request based on the following reasons:

- 1) **Zero Positive Cases:** We closed our building for two months at the onset of the pandemic. We reopened June 1. Since June 1, we have not had any positive cases of COVID 19.
- 2) **Increased Safety Protocols:** We have carefully considered, updated and implemented many health and safety protocols to minimize health risks:
 - Parents are not allowed entry into the school to minimize traffic
 - Daily well checks are conducted on every staff member and student, including temperature checks
 - All staff wear face coverings throughout the day
 - All students over two years of age are asked to wear face coverings
 - Social distancing is practiced throughout the day
 - All special visitors/programs were eliminated
 - All in person tours were eliminated and virtual tours were implemented
 - Additional handwashing, cleaning of materials and cleaning of high touch point areas throughout the day
 - Weekly use (or as needed) of a Halo Disinfection machine which uses an FDA approved mist to designed to kill viruses including COVID-19 on contact
- 3) **We May Be Forced to Ask Families to Withdraw:** If group sizes remain at 15 and COMAR ratios of 1:10 go into effect November 30 per MSDE, we may be forced to ask families to withdraw from our program.
 - a. If centers currently have 14 students and one teacher (group size of 15) in a classroom, when COMAR ratios go into effect, we will have to add a second teacher to meet the 1:10 ratio. Adding the second teacher increases the group size to 16, which would mean centers would be forced to ask one family to withdraw per class to remain at a group size of 15.
 - b. The second option that centers must consider, would be to ask **four families** per classroom to withdraw to avoid adding additional staff members which are additional costs to the school.



How do we decide on which family(ies) to ask to withdraw? Do we ask the mother of a student who is a nurse, the teacher at MCPS who conducts virtual learning or the parent who provides PPE to hospitals? Or do we ask all of them to withdraw?

- 4) **Financial Health of Preschools/Child Care Centers:** As a small business that has been struggling to survive for the past eight months, adding staff (additional payroll costs) to meet the COMAR ratios (1:10) with no way to offset the additional cost could be devastating. Preschools have already added costs since the pandemic with additional PPE supplies, increased prices to those supplies and investments in disinfection machines. NAEYC predicts 30% of preschools will go bankrupt and not re-open. The longer we remain in Phase 2, the more likely additional schools will go bankrupt. Preschools are traditionally operated on very thin margins; by keeping us in Phase 2, operating costs are difficult to cover. **Preschools are running losses each month and will go bankrupt in time if not allowed to enter Phase 3 or maintain relaxed ratios.**
- 5) **Serving Families and Employing Montgomery County Residents:** The unfortunate result of increasing costs of a small business with no way to offset the costs is the loss of quality child care for families in our community, as well as the loss of a preschool who employs 30 people. This is something all centers in the county face.

An Alternative

Finally, in the alternative, we ask that if Montgomery County stays in Phase 2, that teacher to child ratios remain at the relaxed 1:14. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) recently decided to restore child to teacher ratios to 1:10 effective November 30. They did this because 22 counties within the state have moved back to pre-COVID19 group sizes. However, they made no provision for a county that remains in Phase 2 to retain the 1:14 child to teacher ratio that was allowed during Phase 2. We seek your assistance in working with MSDE to keep child to teacher ratios at 1:14 if centers are not permitted to operate at COMAR-licensed group size/capacity. As previously mentioned, moving to 1:10 would require disenrolling students and adding additional staff members, thereby causing centers to incur pre-COVID costs with COVID-restricted capacity. This is not a sustainable business model.

Summary

We can all agree that we want to operate safely and not put children or staff at an unnecessary risk. The infection rate, health and safety protocols, serving our community and maintaining the financial health of child care centers must be taken most into account when deciding the fate of this decision. I believe all of these factors justify why Montgomery County preschools be allowed to move into Phase 3.

Sincerely,

Tracy Rana
School Owner