



APS Staff Hear Our Voice Advocacy Group

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February 22, 2021

Senator Mark Warner

Hart Senate Office Building #703

Washington, DC 20510

Via electronic mail

Re: Request for Funding for COVID-19 Mitigation Measures in K-12

Schools Dear Senator Warner:

We write as members of APS Hear our Voice, a coalition of teachers and staff in Arlington Public Schools who advocate for a safe learning environment for students, teachers and staff in Arlington Public Schools (APS) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other authorities emphasizes that effective mitigation is key to safely delivering in-person instruction and reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools.¹ Effective mitigation enables schools to open safely, and remain open.

We therefore urge the United States Congress to **provide funding for K-12 schools to implement two key mitigation strategies: improvements to air quality and safe dining.**

Money should be specifically allotted for these **air safety purchases**:

- (1) portable HEPA certified air cleaning devices**
- (2) upper-room germicidal UV fixtures, and**
- (3) equipment for outdoor lunch**

Because COVID-19 spreads through the air,² proper ventilation and filtration of the air in our schools is a critical mitigation measure.³ Experts recommend at least 5 air exchanges per hour (ACH) for COVID-19 mitigation. (5-6 ACH is “excellent” and 6 ACH is “ideal.”⁴) Too many schools in APS — as well as in countless other districts in Virginia and the United States — have aging buildings and HVAC systems that fall far below this standard. About 59% of the classrooms in our school district have low air quality, defined as 3 air changes or less of new, outdoor air every hour, according to APS records. Unfortunately, immediate ventilation upgrades are expensive and beyond the reach of most school districts.

¹ [CDC K-12 Operational Strategy; Operating schools during COVID-19: CDC's Considerations](#)

² [Airborne transmission of SARS-CoV-2 to healthcare workers: a narrative review](#) | [Coronavirus is in the air — too much focus on surfaces](#) | [CDC: How COVID-19 Spreads](#) | [Airborne transmission of SARS-CoV-2](#)

³ [HVAC systems in the context of COVID-19: first update](#) | [Role of Ventilation](#) | [SARS-CoV-2 Transmission SAGE-EMG](#) | [CDC Ventilation in Buildings](#)

⁴ [Harvard “Schools for Health” - Guide to Checking Ventilation in Your School](#)

Safe dining is another major challenge for schools during the pandemic. Students eat lunch and breakfast (and sometimes snacks) at school daily. Indoor dining — particularly in communal spaces such as schoolcafeterias — is widely recognized by public health authorities and experts as a high risk activity.⁵ However, most schools, including those in Arlington, lack the resources to provide a safe dining environment at school.

Specifically, **please provide funding for:**

- **Portable HEPA Air Cleaners:** The CDC recommends that schools consider portable high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) fan/filtration systems to enhance air cleaning. Per the CDC, a HEPA filter is at least 99.97% efficient at capturing the tiny airborne viral particles associated with SARS-CoV-2.⁶ Portable HEPA units can be used as an immediate remedy in schools that lack enough air changes of new air, and high-level filtration, in their existing HVAC systems. The American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) also recommends the use of certified air cleaning devices where schools lack MERV 13 filtration.⁷ The HVAC systems in schools in our district lack this level of advanced filtration, so HEPA air cleaners are needed right now. At a cost of about \$300-\$500 per HEPA unit, most school districts require supplemental funding.
- **Upper-Room Germicidal UV Units (“Upper-Room GUV”):** Both the CDC and the U.S. Department of Education recommend that schools consider using ultraviolet germicidal irradiation to provide air cleaning within occupied spaces. Per the CDC, upper-room GUV units can help inactivate SARS-CoV-2, and can be particularly useful when other options for increasing room ventilation are limited. The advantage of upper-room GUV is that it disinfects the air above people who are in the room⁸ and can add a high number of clean air changes to a room’s air supply.

Upper room GUV can be an especially useful air disinfection tool in larger spaces, such as cafeterias, gymnasiums or theater arts rooms that are too large for HEPA filters. At a cost of about \$1,500 per unit, and several times this for a larger space where multiple units would be needed, most schools will need supplemental funding.

- **Equipment for Outdoor Dining:** The CDC recommends that students eat meals outdoors or in classrooms, as feasible.⁹ In order to hold outdoor dining, schools will need funding for equipment. This may include tents or other coverings so that students can eat outdoors when it rains. Schools may also need to purchase seats, tables, mats, etc. Where it is not feasible to hold outdoor dining, schools could use air disinfection tools to provide a safer dining environment indoors, such as Upper Room GUVs in cafeterias or HEPA air cleaners in classrooms. However, none of these items are in schools’ usual budgets.

⁵ CDC rates indoor dining “higher risk,” even if socially-distanced: [Considerations for Restaurants and Bars | COVID-19 | Summary of Guidance for Public Health Strategies to Address High Levels of Community Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 | Is Dining Out Safe During COVID-19? – Health Essentials from Cleveland Clinic | 700 epidemiologists rank indoor dining as “most risky” activity | CDC School Guidance on communal dining spaces](#)

⁶ [CDC Ventilation in Buildings](#)

⁷ [ASHRAE EPIDEMIC TASK FORCE: Core Guidance](#)

⁸ [CDC Ventilation in Buildings | Environmental Control for Tuberculosis: Basic Upper-Room Ultraviolet Germicidal Irradiation Guidelines | ED COVID-19 Handbook Volume 1: Strategies for Safely Reopening](#)

⁹ As feasible, have children eat meals outdoors or in classrooms, while maintaining social distance (at least 6 feet apart) as much as possible, instead of in a communal dining hall or cafeteria.” [Operating schools during COVID-19: CDC’s Considerations](#)

Schools in Arlington — and across Virginia and the United States — need your help.

We urge Congress to provide the funding that K-12 schools need to implement the COVID-19 mitigation measures recommended by public health authorities and experts, and open school buildings safely.

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to us at apshearourvoice@gmail.com Thank you in advance for your support for providing a safe learning environment for students, teachers and staff in K-12 schools.

Sincerely,

1. /s/ *Christine Bolon, Arlington Public Schools*
2. /s/ *Dakota Springston, Arlington Public Schools*
3. /s/ *Mikaela Kidd, Arlington Public Schools*
4. /s/ *Julia Meadows, Arlington Public Schools*
5. /s/ *Roseline Berger, Arlington Public Schools*
6. /s/ *Rose Crittenden, Arlington Public Schools*
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14. /s/ *Tamara Molina, Arlington Public Schools*
15. /s/ *Teresa Fields, Arlington Public Schools*
16. /s/ *Tereza Townsend, Arlington Public Schools*
17. /s/ *Abigail Crain, Arlington Public Schools*
18. /s/ *Peter Anderson, Arlington Public Schools*
19. /s/ *Frankie Haan, Arlington Public Schools*
20. /s/ *Nicole Pradas, Arlington Public Schools*
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22. /s/ *Dan Carroll, Arlington Public Schools*
23. /s/ *Danielle Anctil, Arlington Public Schools*
24. /s/ *Camee Beyers, Arlington Public Schools*
25. /s/ *Ryan Zito, Arlington Public Schools*
26. /s/ *Karina Valdez, Arlington Public Schools*
27. /s/ *Margot Shteir-Dunn, Arlington Public Schools*
28. /s/ *Molly Haines, Arlington Public Schools*
29. /s/ *Patty Tuttle, Arlington Public Schools*
30. /s/ *Celeste Capaldi, Arlington Public Schools*
31. /s/ *David McDavitt, Arlington Public Schools*

Arlington, Virginia

cc:

Senator Timothy M. Kaine

Representative Don Beyer

¹⁰ [Contact Tracing during Coronavirus Disease Outbreak, South Korea, 2020](#)

¹¹ [COVID-19 Event Risk Assessment Planning Tool](#)