



February 22, 2021

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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,

The members of the Arlington Education Association (AEA) stand in full support of the request for additional school funding to support a safe return to school buildings during the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently we have support of parents, educators, and the community of Arlington. Evidence of support is provided by Smart Restart APS, a coalition of parents and educators in Arlington, Virginia. We anticipate the Virginia Education Association (VEA), representing school districts across the Commonwealth of Virginia, will also lend support to this request.

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. AEA is concerned that mitigation protocols are not in effect, nor consistent to protect staff and students in Arlington Public Schools (APS). Vaccination of school staff is well underway in many of our schools in Virginia, particularly Arlington. However, the students remain at risk, as well as their families at home and those in the community, as we continue to experience high community transmission.

AEA unites this urgent request made of the United States Congress to provide funding for K-12 schools to implement two key mitigation strategies: Improvements in 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**

¹ [C 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](#)

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.

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 school cafeterias — 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 Certified Air Cleaning equipment:**
- **Upper-Room Germicidal UV Units, and**
- **Equipment for outdoor breakfast and lunch:**

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, to allow opening school buildings safely at this time.

Respectfully,

Ingrid Gant

Ingrid Gant,
President

Cc

Senator Timothy M. Kaine
Representative Don Beyer

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](#)



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