

AEL Presentation to the Board of Education by Edie Picken, AEL President

October 28, 2020

Good evening President Corkadel, distinguished Board members and Dr. Arlotto,

I want to begin by thanking Mr. Smith for his motion to hold this meeting so that stakeholders could express their concerns regarding the reopening plan. I know we all appreciate your consideration.

There are a multitude of variables involved in the decisions being made; however, with the implosion of information coming from so many directions and sources there is no wonder that still there is a very high sense of fear.

School based administrators have numerous questions about protocols and the plan.

Our concerns:

1. At one of the last two Board meetings, Dr. Arlotto stated that 70% of employees indicated they would be coming back. I question that data because a survey AEL conducted provides different feedback, which I know is similar for TAAAC. Unit II employees were asked how comfortable they felt about returning to work full time without students. 71% indicated they were comfortable, while 29% indicated they were not. They were asked for reasons if they were not and they were due to reasons that we have heard and know are reasonable.
2. When Unit II was asked if they were comfortable returning to work full time with students, the response was different: 53% indicated they were comfortable while 47% indicated they were not. This is almost 50-50 which is not what was presented to you. I am curious as to how there is a 70% positivity response when these results don't support that.
3. Comfort Level—There are still many who simply are not comfortable with what is happening. There has been no formal presentation to employees focusing on the health metrics and state of COVID in Anne Arundel County. I, Mr. Leone, Ms. Wilkerson were invited to a meeting with Dr. Kalyanaraman, other Health Department staff, and Dr. Arlotto. Following that meeting I asked Dr. Arlotto if that same presentation could be provided to employees because I personally felt that it would assist with helping to reduce the fear factor that still is real. There was supposed to be a news presentation, but that never occurred. Why?
4. The Plan: With respect to elementary schools, some elementary principals shared they have planning meetings barely before students will enter the building. If these principals do not work on weekends or election day, the amount of time to plan is simply not enough. They need to have everything ready to go, to share with families at least one week in advance--which greatly impacts the planning time given. It has been said by the superintendent it's like "We are building a plane while flying it." Why exactly are we doing that?

5. What professional development has the Central Office provided teachers and administrators to help them with the transition and how hybrid instruction looks and works? Merely saying it's on the website is not helpful.
6. Coverage – When will principals know who on their staff has received approval for accommodations, Leaves of Absence, resign, or retire? There are only 3 people who are fielding over a thousand requests and they are still coming in? When those numbers come in, staffing is looking like a nightmare. Volunteers have been suggested. Who will they be? Will they be vetted in time to fill the openings?
7. High Stress – Little to no work/life balance. It is non-stop and now we are being asked to enter hybrid before the end of the semester which would allow for the time to truly transition with integrity and preparation.
8. Protocols –Many schools are being used as polling places and Central Office did not close them to those staff that work in those locations. Trying to get through the gauntlet of voters who were not socially distancing, were blocking access to the office—even with an area in front of office access doors taped off and the statement do not stand here, voters ignored it and at times were extremely rude when asked to please move so we could access our office area. The business managers requested from the Board of Elections the protocols they would be following. That information was never provided. Watching for two days in a row this fiasco occur, placed undue pressure on these schools to clean so that employees could safely access these areas. We have no idea who these people were or what potential exposures they could have had or brought into these buildings and we are talking about bringing children and staff back into them who have not been in them since March. These schools have no control over who is coming into the building.
9. We will be engaged with students in a variety of capacities. What guarantees are there that parents will indeed check their students for symptoms before sending their children to school? What if the parent refuses to come and pick up their student until the end of the day? Will the administration be responsible for removing the student and taking that student to the health room? What is the protocol for breaking up a fight? Will we be tested regularly? When it comes to secondary students, how will students be distributed when there are only 15 students permitted in a classroom and the teacher has over 30 students? Does another teacher now have to take students not in their class because they have room? High school is not cohorted. How, if we begin at some point to bring those students back, will that occur? Will there be additional staff available to assist with escorting students to the various places in the building? What about the student who refuses to wear his/her mask and to come with administration to the office? The list goes on.
10. Different time schedules virtual/hybrid: Why do those students remaining virtual have to be on a different schedule than those in the hybrid classroom? We understand that those students who will be hybrid on those days they are home will be on the same schedule as those in the

classroom. This deals with those students remaining home due to accommodations and/or parent decision to remain virtual. Should they not be the same and if so, why not?

11. Workload – I have alluded to this several times during my presentation to you. In spite of what the current teacher schedule says on paper, I can guarantee you there is inadequate time for teachers to plan and meet the needs of their students. Why do I bring this up? Because teachers are reaching out to us for help, guidance, and a voice. They are overwhelmed and need relief. You can see it in their faces, the same way you can see it in the faces of some students their feeling of being virtual. I am proud of the teachers in my school and across the county for their professionalism, their commitment to working so hard so their students are receiving the best possible education they can provide under these circumstances, and that they want to do better, but there has to be some give. Without the other answers, moving to the hybrid model now, as opposed to the end of the semester, is adding an incredible amount of undue pressure and stress on all employees.

In closing, I would like to reference a wonderful book I read last spring, The Great Influenza by John Barry. By the time I reached the end of this fabulous book, it did not surprise me that what the CDC is recommending we do is asking too much. In fact, these very protocols were in place during that time in order to help quash it. On page 458, Mr. Barry noted "...the CDC will recommend school closure only in a severe pandemic. That is the right decision." COVID-19 meets that qualification. He also noted on page 459, "...continued monitoring of the virus is absolutely necessary. A shift in the behavior of the virus—as from the first wave in 1918 to the second—may call for a shift in the response to it. Surveillance is critical not only in advance of but during a pandemic." This has been going on since March. But he goes on to note on page 459 & 460 & 461 "So the problems presented by a pandemic are, obviously immense. But the biggest problem lies in the relationship between governments and the truth." "For if there is a single dominant lesson from 1918, it's that governments need to tell the truth in a crisis....Those in authority must retain the public's trust. The way to do that is to distort nothing, to put the best face on nothing, to try to manipulate no one. Lincoln said that first and best... A leader must make whatever horror exists concrete. Only then will people be able to break it apart."