

I live in Frederick County, Maryland. I have 2 children who have Autism. My oldest is son Connor is 13 soon to be 14 years old and my youngest son Benjamin is 8 soon to be 9. Connor was in 3rd grade when Covid hit and Benjamin was in Pre K 4 and not verbal at this time. We found that our children started to flourish. I could tell you all the reasons why for our family Remote learning was a lifesaver and allowing our special children to not only succeed but thrive. When Frederick County initially voted last year to end The Remote Virtual Program my family went and gave public comment to the Special Education Advisory Committee, The Frederick County Government Council, and The Frederick County Public Schools Board of education. I am going to show you 3 of the public comments my children wrote and gave and one of my own. Frederick County Public Schools has curcurrently saved their Remote Virtual Program for the time being. I want to

help ensure that this learning opportunity is saved and provided for all students that want it in the state of Maryland.

Connor 1st public comment:

My name is Connor Campbell. I am 13 years old, and I have Autism. You have saved RVP for middle school, but you only promised it for 1 year. You have done nothing to save RVP for elementary school. You are failing to recognize the necessity for this to be provided for younger children. In 1 year, what changes? Because the reasons for us and other children to be in virtual will not have changed. We will still have Autism, ADHD, Tourettes, Social Anxiety, PTSD from previous bullying in person, and some of us will still just learn better in a calmer environment.

When I was in 3rd grade, I was suffering from major anxiety caused by being in the in

person setting. My parents even talked about possibly pulling me out of the in person setting due to all the stress it was causing me. I was coming home in tears almost every day and unable to move past the trauma the school day had caused me. I was having sleepless nights and was losing weight. When they spoke to my counselors about options for me they were told about a virtual program that was being developed for elementary and middle school and would be starting in a few years and that it might work better for me. A few months later, COVID happened. So if my family knew about these plans prior to COVID happening, why does the Board of Education keep saying that it came out of COVID? Why has everyone seemed to have forgotten that this program was already in the works?

You talk about the cost and not having the ability to afford it. But I've been listening to

everyone talking about the numbers, and as many know, numbers are my thing. If it's only around \$11,000.00 to teach each of us in the RVP, that is far less than the average cost for each student in the in person setting which for FY 2023 was \$16,324.00, with inflation that number would have only gone up. Just say it's around \$17,000.00 per student in the in person setting. For 224 students, that's \$3,808,000.00. For those same 224 students in the RVP setting, it would cost about \$2,464,000.00. That means you would be spending 54.5% more to teach these same students in the in person setting. So say you have 10 children requiring an additional spending due to their learning disabilities. This would be about \$30,000 per student, and that's an additional \$300,000.00 for one year. Then say you have 2 students who need a 1 to 1 nurse at around \$100,000 per student. That's an additional \$200,000.00 per year. So now, you would be looking at an additional

\$500,000.00. And remember there are currently 69 of us with IEPs and 504s meaning this could actually cost more. I am being conservative. Add that to the \$3,808,000.00 and now you are looking to spend \$4,308,000.00 for the same 224 students. So it will cost you 74.8% more to teach these same students in the in person setting. So mathematically, how does it make sense to end the RVP? It doesn't!

In conclusion, our needs are not going to change in a year. All students are expected to have the least restrictive environment to learn in. RVP did not come out of COVID, it was already being planned for before COVID happened. It costs far more to teach us in person than in the RVP especially when you calculate in those with special needs and those that are medically fragile. This could be funded with 75% of our MSF. The RVP needs to be reinstated for elementary school and be

made permanent for all grades like it was originally intended. Thank you.

Connor last public comment:

Hello! My name is Connor Campbell and I am in 8th grade. I am 13 years old, and I have Autism. You have saved RVP for middle school, but you only promised it for 1 year. You should also bring back RVP for elementary school and keep both elementary and middle school permanently. In 1 year, what changes? Because the reasons for us and other children to be in virtual school will not have changed. We will still have Autism, ADHD, Tourettes, Social Anxiety, PTSD from previous bullying in person, and some of us will just learn better in a calmer environment for many reasons, including both physical and mental health. Some of us have been the victims of a traumatic event in person. Do

you think it is good for someone's mental health to keep returning to the location of where you experienced that traumatic event? For me, going in person would be challenging. It would be very difficult to switch classes due to the large number of students in the hallways at that time. The cafeteria would also have a lot of students eating lunch at the same time which would be extremely over stimulating and too loud. In both these situations, it would be very overwhelming and I would feel very nervous and anxious. For example, it would be easy to get lost in a hallway with a bunch of people in the hallway at once. I would also feel anxious if I were to get lost. For me the busy hallways are too noisy. When I am in an area with lots of noise coming from different directions it's very disorienting. Imagine walking through a parking lot with all the cars blowing their horns at different times and how that would affect you.

RVP is a better place for me for many reasons. All I have to do to switch classes is type in the meeting code for my class. Also, there is more flexibility for eating lunch since I would be eating lunch at home where there are more options and it is less crowded since the only people on the room would be me and my family. Being able to go to school from home has allowed me to have the calm, quiet environment I need to thrive.

Learning in person was okay, but it was not as good as virtual. I was struggling more and more as the years went on in person. I would get overwhelmed and this would cause me to have meltdowns. It would take me hours to get past them and be able to continue on with my day. I went to school but I didn't really care about it. But when virtual school started, I started getting better grades and I did better than ever in school. Doing school virtually was working for me and still is today. Not only was I getting good



grades but now I love school. I look forward to going to school and love to learn. I currently have straight A's in all my classes including Honnors Language Arts and I am in Algebra 2, which you would normally learn in 11th Grade.

As you can see, it is very obvious that we need virtual school. It is better in a lot of ways and it should be a permanent part of the school system. Without virtual. What would we do? Because going back in person for some of us is not an option. Please don't take away our school, expand it and continue to be leaders in modern education.

Benjamin 1st public comment:

My name is Benji. I am 8 years old, and I have Autism. I miss being in class online with my friends. I was homeschooled last year when they canceled 1st and 2nd Grade for RVP at the end of last school year. I was accepted

back into the RVP for 3rd Grade in March. I was looking forward to going back to the RVP for 3rd Grade, now you have taken that away from me too. I learn better where it's quiet with less distraction. Please give me back my school.

## My last public comment

Let me start by telling you a little story. I like my 2 children am neurodiverse. I may not have Autism like my sons, but I have severe HDHD and am dyslexic. In 2nd grade there was a teachers aid who would make fun of me. They called me names in front of the other children in my class. They encouraged the other kids to tease me. They told me I was worth less than my nickname which is Penny. Fortunately they switched schools halfway through the year, but the teasing from the other kids persisted even after they were gone. In 5th grade i was bullied and

attacked almost on a daily basis in school. There was a group of 5 girls who made it their mission to torment me. The school refused to do anything about it as they would say it was my word against theirs since their attacks never took place in front of staff. Didn't matter that I had signs of having been attacked and they didn't. The torment became so bad that I would come home from school everyday and contemplate taking my own life. Thank God that my fear of what happens after you die kept me from going down that path.

Fast forward to middle school. I made new friends and things got better. Well until 8th grade anyway. In 8th grade I had a student target me. They wrote notes signing my name to them and would stick them in another classmate's locker or on her desk before class. These notes were cruel in nature. Other kids believing I had written

these notes started tormenting me, threatening me and picking on me.

Thankfully it was eventually figured out, but not before I had been brought into the principal's office and accused of writing the notes and almost suspended. I was only proven innocent because some of the information written in the notes was only known to 2 students and I was not one of them.

Now fast forward to 10th grade. I was violently raped by another student I went to school with during the winter break. I then had to return to school and face that student. Even after the student was arrested that student was allowed to stay in school since they hadn't been convicted yet. Leaving me either have to have to keep seeing them every school day or to drop out of school. I ended up dropping out of school for the rest of the semester. Meanwhile my mom fought the

school board to allow me to switch schools. Which was granted for the second semester. When starting at the new school i was in a bad place mentally. The kids at my new school i am sure picked up on this and almost immediately the bullying started. It was so bad that I ended up returning to my original school the next school year since the student who raped me had graduated and no longer attended. It took almost a year to go to trial. If you are wondering at trial they were found guilty of every charge and sent to jail.

Why did I tell you all this? I am telling you all this because I know for me if there had been a remote virtual option growing up i would of begged to be in it. The mental health of our children is so important. Protecting them is important. These things happened back then and things like this still happen today.

I currently watch my neurodiverse son who was suffering horribly while in person thrive in the RVP. He makes straight A's is 3 years ahead in math and happy. I am thankful that he has the option to learn remotely in a safe environment. I was devastated to see this taken away from my younger neurodiverse child. Now I am fighting to save the RVP middle school while begging for them to reinstate the RVP elementary school. Please do what's right and file to have RVP made an official school. Properly advertise it and expand it. No child should suffer the way I did. No child should have to fear what will happen to them when they are at school the way i did. Please vote to fully reinstate the RVP. Thank you

Please help make virtual education a choice for all students that want this option. For some it very well may be the difference between success and failure.

Thank you for your time.

Penelope Campbell