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## **Last minute changes to SPED student schedules, teacher assignments, education experiences**

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9/21/20

To:

Members of the Arlington School Committee: Jane Morgan, Kirsi Allison-Ampe, Liz Exton, Bill Hayner, Len Kardon, Paul Schlichtman, Jeff Thielman  
Karen Fitzgerald, Arlington School Committee Admin Assistant

cc:

Kathleen Bodie, APS Superintendent

Alison Elmer, APS SPED Director

Inae Hwang, SEPAC Chair

Members of The Arlington SPED Alliance (TASA)

Members of The Arlington Elementary Remote Academy Facebook Group

To the members of The Arlington School Committee,

As most of you probably already know, numerous parents of elementary level SPED students in Arlington who selected the Remote Academy for Fall 2020 have reported receiving phone calls or emails from APS staff this weekend, informing the parents of last minute changes to their child's class and teacher assignments. A number of these students had already been introduced to their prospective teachers, and now will have to join a remote classroom on Monday with a teacher whom they have never met, even by video.

Last minute changes of this kind are very problematic for SPED students who struggle with transitions and change even in the best of circumstances. Last minute changes in routine are a recipe for anxiety and reduced ability to learn for many students and sometimes even school refusal.

Several parents have been told that, if they wish to keep their child in the originally assigned classroom, they will have to waive SPED services for their child. Given the fact that APS failed to deliver mandated IEP services to many SPED students last spring, it is astonishing that APS would suggest that any reduction in services is an acceptable scenario for a student who is already struggling.

In addition to the last minute changes announced to many Remote Academy SPED parents, a number of SPED parents whose children are planning to attend school in-person four days per week received information this weekend about the likely educational experience during days 3 & 4 that directly contradicts what APS told them previously. For example, APS previously agreed with one parent that their child would do asynchronous work on days 3 & 4 with assistance from a SPED staff person in a smaller space in the building. However, this weekend, the parent was told that asynchronous work will not be possible - that the child will simply have to join a Thurs/Frid

Gen Ed class and thus sit through the exact same educational experience twice in one week. Such a practice will fail to meet the educational needs of this SPED student.

Another parent whose child will be attending school in person four days each week has just been informed that, instead of a dismissal time of 2:30 pm on each of the four days, the child will be dismissed at 2:30 pm on two days, and at 1:45 pm on the other two days. This parent has not had time to make an alternative plan for their child on the two weekdays that the child will be dismissed earlier than expected.

The SPED parents with whom I have been in contact are very angry. They understand the incredible challenges posed by the COVID-19 situation on the APS administration, but they also feel that they have been very patient in giving APS time to assess the SPED staffing challenges at hand, schedule SPED students, and make plans to deliver SPED services without this demoralizing chaos the weekend before school starts.

I encourage you, the members of the Arlington School Committee, to immediately convene a discussion with the APS administration to find out what is happening and to find out why APS failed to inform parents about their children's final schedules, teacher assignments, and services in a more timely fashion. SPED parents need to hear from both you and from the APS administration ASAP, and they need to know that this is not going to happen again.

Deborah E. Savage PhD,

Founder and Director

The Arlington SPED Alliance (TASA)

<https://arlingtonspedalliance.wordpress.com/>