

I am writing on behalf of the recent communication from Dr. Travis Gayles (October 6) to overturn Governor Hogan's decision to return group size for preschool to pre-Covid levels and remain in Phase 2. As an owner of 3 preschools in Montgomery County known as The Goddard School, we object to this decision and would offer a fact-based discussion as justification. Unless I have missed the communication, I have yet to see specific justification on the infection rate of children aged 0-5 from Dr. Gayles as to why this decision was made.

### Infection Rate

My 3 schools have remained open since Covid has begun primarily providing programming for essential personnel in the early months of Covid and now slowly has returned to more normalized operations as we moved into September. Our licensed capacity is 700 students daily with total staff of 172. We are operating with less students today as a result of the decision to remain in Phase 2.

From March to today, we have logged a total of 4 positive Covid cases.

School	Children	Teachers
Clarksburg	0	0
Rockville	1	2
Bethesda	1	0

3 Other Montgomery County Goddard Schools (not owned by me) with similar enrollment have logged a total of 2 additional children and one additional teacher since March to today.

**This represents 7 total cases spread throughout 6 total schools over a 7-month period. Zero deaths with 100% recovery.**

It should be noted that there was NO transmission from any positive case to another person within any classroom or school at large.

### Safety Protocols

We are proud of our safety protocols which are listed below. We believe these procedures contribute to our infection rate being so low and serve as additional justification for allowing us to expand our class size to pre-Covid levels. They have been in place since March.

- Utilizing multiple entrances into the school to social distance arrivals/departures.
- Not allowing ANY parent into the school.

- Checking the temperature of all students and teachers daily.
- Daily questionnaire upon arrival regarding symptoms and family health for students and teachers.
- All staff are masked throughout the day.
- All children aged 2-3 are encouraged to wear masks. All children 4-5 are required to wear masks.
- Eliminating any/all visitors and special programs.
- Excessive handwashing and use of cleaning materials throughout the day.
- Elimination of floaters. We only allow primary teacher(s) into each classroom. Extended hours causes excessive overtime pay for staff but eliminates the possibility of spreading the virus into multiple classrooms if a case is diagnosed.
- Daily use of Zono machine which uses ozone to sanitize children's toys and kill virus on contact.
- Use of Halo machine which emits an FDA approved mist designed to kill viruses including Covid-19 on contact. Used weekly and/or as needed.

### Parent Needs

In the end, parents want their children to return to school. As proof, our school in Howard County that kept 30 students from returning due to the restriction enrolled EVERY one of these spots within 1 week. That school is now fully enrolled to pre-Covid levels.

### Industry Financial Health

I recognize that the Health Officer has the best intentions to keep citizens safe yet appears to not be interested in the health of the preschool industry. NAEYC predicts 30% of preschools will go bankrupt and not re-open. The longer we remain in Phase 2, the more likely additional schools will go bankrupt. Preschools are traditionally operated on very thin margins; by keeping us in Phase 2, profitability is sacrificed. My schools are all running losses each month and will go bankrupt in time if not allowed to enter Phase 3. There is already a shortage of quality childcare; in particular infant care. This decision will further contribute to this problem.

### Child to Teacher Ratios

Further complicating our operations is the recent decision by the Department of Education to restore child to teacher ratios to 1:10. They did this because 22 counties within the state have moved back to pre-Covid group sizes. However, they made no provision for a county that remains in Phase 2 to retain the 1:14 child to teacher ratio that was allowed during Phase 2. We seek your assistance in working with the Department of Education that if group size is not restored to pre-Covid levels that child to teacher ratios will remain at 1:14. Moving to 1:10 would require firing 1 student from every preschool/pre-kindergarten classroom and adding in an additional staff member reducing revenue and increasing cost. This action is slated to begin 11/30/20.

### Summary

In the end, we can all agree that we want to operate safely and not put children at an unnecessary risk. The infection rate, however, is what must be taken most into account when deciding the fate of this decision. I believe the lack of reported cases within our program truly justifies on its' own, why Montgomery County preschools be allowed to move into Phase 3.

Sincerely,

Ross Flax  
The Goddard School of Rockville  
The Goddard School of Clarksburg  
The Goddard School of Bethesda  
The Goddard School of Ellicott City  
The Goddard School of Tysons