Calvert Parents Group Continues Fight To Reopen Schools

Posted by Cyn On 10/12/2020

CALVERT COUNTY, Md. - Calvert Parents United considers the decision to return some county children to in-person classes a victory but the fight's not over yet.

The Calvert County School Board voted 3-2 in favor a hybrid plan than combines virtual and in-person classes for students in grades K-2. Children head back to the physical classrooms on November 9.

While the school board met inside to discuss the decision on Thursday, members of Calvert Parents United held a rally outside Calvert County Public Schools headquarters calling for kids to return to school.

While some demonstrations calling for reopening have turned angry in many places, the organization requested that members, "Be respectful, wear your mask, bring your kids & teens, and your positive signs!"

The Maryland Department of Health encouraged school reopening as long as the rate of new cases stayed at less than 5% per 100,000 in the district.

Worried About Isolation

Sunderland mother-of-two, Julie Fortenbery, said the group was formed to help get students back in the physical classroom. Fortenbery, one of seven founding members of Calvert Parents United, said it feels like a win. "We were very excited. What we feel we're up against as parents is fear. From the general public, particularly the teachers union and some of the board members who don't want to take the responsibility of making a decision. We feel it will start to demonstrate that this is not so scary."

Fortenbery said she worries her kids aren't getting the education they deserve from virtual learning. "I am the mother of two high school-age students. I get to see what's on the other side of the screen. I can see an environment that, as hard as we try, is not perfectly conducive for learning. I see children who are isolated."

Better Than Nothing

Jana Smith Post, who has four children, also worried about the isolation that comes with distance learning.

"There are a number of reasons I am in favor of going back:
- Virtual learning is not as beneficial as in-person learning.
- Social and emotional well being is important.
- Sitting in front of a laptop for hours on end causes unnecessary eye strain."

Post said her own experience shows that it is possible to safely return to school. "Three of my children participated in summer school and it was a wonderful experience. I firmly believe that with the proper PPE and training, returning to school is possible."

Post said that the return of K-2 children to school is only the beginning. She wants older students back in the classroom as well. "The hybrid plan is better than nothing, however, I would prefer an all in-person schedule and I do plan to send my children back."

Critics of the hybrid plan worry that returning to school too soon will undo Maryland's progress in the fight against the spread of COVID-19.

Continue To Fight

While Fortenbery said the Calvert Parents United group formed to fight for school reopening, the group has decided there are other issues it wants to tackle as well. "We've heard from a lot of people who need to continue to fight for different issues." To that end, the group decided to back write-in candidates for Calvert County Board of Education seats in Districts 2 and 3.

Post declared her intention to run as a write-in candidate in District 2.

The hybrid plan only passed by one vote and members are afraid that the board could change its mind. Fortenbery said, "From my perspective, there are many more risks and side effects of kids not being in school. We can't let fear drive these decisions."