

JEN COUSINS – OCPS PARENT – 1-26-22 IMPASSE STATEMENT

I have four kids, three of whom are currently enrolled in OCPS. A kindergartener, 2nd grader, and 6th grader. At both of the schools my kids attend, there are real safety concerns.

PPE has been an ongoing issue. When my son's mask broke, his elementary school classroom did not have any, so he had to walk mask-less through the building and the paper mask that he finally received was far too big for his face, thus not protecting him from COVID exposure. In our middle school, if there are masks in the classrooms, it's because the teacher bought them with their own money or a parent donated them, NOT because the district supplied them. The cloth masks that they offer at the front office are too small to fit middle school faces. Some schools are out of the most basic hygiene supplies, such as soap in bathrooms and hand sanitizer in the classrooms. Providing these basic supplies has been left to the teachers, as has the cleaning of classrooms.

While social distancing is more difficult now that schools are back to full capacity, efforts are not even being made to control distancing where it is possible, such as in the hallways.

The district seems to have given up on contact tracing and transparency. When 14 students in my 6th grader's immediate classes recently tested positive, I never even received a contact tracing communication. To make matters worse, the OCPS COVID tracking dashboard is terribly inaccurate and unhelpful. I know of several cases in my kid's schools that were never reflected on the dashboard, nor did I receive a call about them from the school. I don't know any parents who trust the dashboard data.

There hasn't been clear communication with parents regarding safety protocols or exposures and we've been getting incredibly mixed messages that raise more questions than answers. For example, after winter break and Omicron was already raging, the district stated that our kids could stay home and complete their work if they were exposed at school. After keeping my child home following an exposure, to keep them and their peers safe, I received a message from the school complaining that they had more than 5 absences for the school year. Mixed communications like this are confusing and show the district has no clear policies and is not following the policies it claims to have in place.

The lack of safety protocols has led to the uncontrolled spread of COVID, causing disruptions in learning and preventable student and teacher absences. When a teacher is out sick, students from multiple classes are shoved into school media centers and cafeterias to basically sit for study hours, threatening their safety and damaging their education. This district is failing our kids, teachers and staff. It's hard to tell they've had two years to learn, prepare, and perfect their COVID safety plans. It's not fair to any of us, and the consequences to our kid's health and education are real. OCPS needs to be held accountable for the dangerous school and work conditions it's created.