

I would like to provide: *	In-Person Virtual Public Comments
Select the meeting date:* *	January 7, 2021
My public comments are related to: *	Virtual+ Plus Learning
Topic *	Virtual + Learning for Special Education Students
Full Name *	Erika Melman
What is your relationship to ACPS? *	Parent/Guardian of an ACPS Student

Good afternoon, my name is Erika Melman. I will focus my comments on how virtual learning has impacted my child with complex special needs.

One of my child's many learning differences is hard of hearing. Virtual learning inhibits his ability to lip read as the sound from computers can be distorted or out of synch with the video, and ambient sounds from other speakers interferes with his hearing aid. He often says that his head hurts as a reaction to the harsh and discordant mixture of sounds. At these times, he is not able to access the same school material that students without hearing difficulty are accessing.

He used to be confident in the general education setting despite his extreme learning differences because of the nuanced way that special education teachers push in to the general education classroom. However, the electronic methods of information sharing that support virtual learning have amplified for him just how different he is from his neurotypical peers. Previously confident in his abilities to learn, he now calls himself 'stupid' and says 'I hate myself' and 'I will never learn to read or write or do math'.

He has also developed extreme behaviors to avoid virtual learning. I have had to install extra locks to minimize his attempts to escape out of the room or out of the house before or during virtual school sessions. When he experiences frustrations with virtual school, he calls himself useless and has said that he should kill himself, going so far as to retrieve a knife. This behavior from a previously bubbly and confident child is scary.

A final difficulty of virtual learning that I will cover is that because of his disabilities, the only way for my child to

participate in virtual school is for me to act as a 1:1 instructional aide for him. As an essential worker in healthcare operations, I am eligible to enroll him at one of the Virtual + partners for child care and school monitoring. However, staffing at those centers does not support his need for 1:1 supervision. The tension between needing to be available to him while also maintaining full-time employment as a single parent has negatively affected his attendance. When I can't flex my work responsibilities, he misses school sessions because he is unable to independently use a computer to access virtual learning.

In sum, the costs of virtual schooling for my student far outweigh the risks of being educated in an in-person setting.