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Fairfax County Parents Association (FCPA)

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## FCPS Relies on Wealthier Families to Cover Up the System Failing Low Income Students

“I am an FCPS teacher with both Elementary and Middle School experience. I have some openings to do private tutoring this summer and/or school year.” – one of many ads found online offering tutoring services for FCPS students.

When FCPS announced that the 2020-2021 school year would be virtual, many FCPS teachers knew what they had to do: market their in-person services to parents desperate to keep their kids from falling behind. The going rate was \$50 per hour and double or triple that if a group of parents pooled their resources and students into an in-person “teaching pod.”

The de-facto privatization of the public school system has been an open secret in Fairfax County for decades. Wealthy parents routinely buy their kids a second shift of school after the dismissal bell, an arrangement that increases test scores for these students and permits the Fairfax County School Board to bask in the reputational glow of a “premier” school system.

And the kids whose parents can’t afford hundreds of dollars per week for that second school shift? The numbers tell the tale. While the typical (i.e., tutored) FCPS student is far more likely to pass the third grade reading Standards of Learning (SOL) test than the state average, FCPS economically disadvantaged students are 22% less likely to pass than their economically-disadvantaged peers statewide. Economically disadvantaged students made up less than a third of the FCPS students who took a reading SOL in 2024, but they made up two-thirds of the students who failed that test. The statewide pass rates for English language learners (ELLs) on the fifth-grade math SOL are going up over time, while the equivalent FCPS pass rates are falling. Fewer than one in three FCPS ELL students passed the fifth-grade math SOL in the spring of 2024, and statewide ELL student pass rates are 16% higher than FCPS’s.

The Fairfax County Parents Association supports the statewide school accountability system recently passed by the Virginia Board of Education because ***we want our public schools to serve all students, rich and poor alike.*** The great American public school pioneer Horace Mann said “Education, then, beyond all other divides of human origin, is a great equalizer of the conditions of men—the balance wheel of the social machinery.” The previous school accountability system allowed school systems to conceal the poor performance of students without the ability to pay behind the performance of students whose families could.

All Virginia public school students deserve a premier education *during* school hours. It’s time to make the second shift obsolete.

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*Fairfax County Parents Association (FCPA) is a volunteer-led, non-partisan, grassroots coalition of thousands of parents that seeks to ensure students are the first priority in Fairfax County Public Schools. The group’s participants include parents from all areas of Fairfax County who come from across the political spectrum, cultural backgrounds, and economic strata. The group advocates for student-focused, student-prioritized implementation of education and education policies in Fairfax County. The FCPA will work to support teachers and staff of the school system to aid their efforts to educate our children.*