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A virtual slap in the face

Mask policy means that some kids can't come into buildings

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The Albemarle County school division is denying in-person learning access to students with disabilities who can't or won't wear a face covering — a group that should be exempted from the mask requirement, according to a

state public health order.

As part of a stepped up enforcement of the division's mask policy that was revised over the summer, the district now says that a student who isn't comfortable wearing a mask has three choices: virtual school, home school or a private school, division spokesman Phil Giaramita said Monday.

The division's mask policy and its implementation forces a small but vulnerable population of students into virtual learning, which parents say doesn't meet their needs. Parents say the unexpected

enforcement has left them struggling to determine how their child will learn this year and receive the supports they need to progress academically.

"You can understand what this does to families," said Vera Volodin, an Albemarle County mom. "I've gone back to work this year for the first time. I took a teaching job in a different school because I thought Daniel was going to be in school and so I could do this. Now I'm looking at the situation of having my handicapped child in the classroom with me while I'm

trying to teach middle schoolers."

Volodin said that learning her 13-year-old couldn't go into the building if he didn't wear a mask all day was like a bomb dropping in her lap.

It is unclear why Albemarle chose to strictly enforce mask-wearing among students with disabilities during in-person instruction, when the state public health order, issued Aug. 12, specifically exempts "persons with health conditions or disabilities that prohibit wearing a mask." Other school divisions in the area have policies in place that

allow students with disabilities to not wear a mask.

Volodin, whose son Daniel is not able to wear a mask all day, said she supports the broader requirement but feels an exception is needed for students like her son. Daniel, who goes to Henley Middle School, has autism and an epilepsy disorder and is developmentally at the level of an 18-month-old, she said.

Volodin said her son doesn't understand why he needs to wear a mask.

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FILE PHOTO

Cars are stacked on top of each other on the banks of Blue Creek being swept up in flood water on August 23 in Waverly, Tenn. Heavy rains are expected Wednesday along Interstate 81 with storms and heavy rain in Central Virginia.

Weaker Ida to still pack punch

Hurricane to bring a lot of rain to area

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A hard rain is going to fall across parts of Central Virginia Wednesday as Hurricane Ida's soggy remnants set sights on the Blue Ridge Mountains, and Gov.

Ralph Northam has declared a state of emergency in advance.

Northam declared the emergency on Tuesday as weather forecasters predicted heavy rains and flooding along the Interstate 81 corridor. The National Weather Service issued a flash flood watch for Central Virginia for the whole day Wednesday.

"While we're fortunate in Virginia to have avoided the

hurricane itself, heavy rainfall is expected to cause additional flash flooding and dangerous conditions in portions of the commonwealth," Northam said in a statement.

The declaration allows state resources to be deployed to regions and communities where they are most needed and to provide coordinated planning and evacuation.

According to the weather service, Ida is expected to bring heavy rain and flooding along Interstate 81 and Interstate 66 with a risk of tornadoes throughout Wednesday.

The weather service said the rain and the wind aren't all Ida. "The remnants of Ida will interact with a stalled front

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Fair policing will need good data, chief says

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You can't have equity without data. That was the message Tuesday in a forum between Charlottesville Chief of Police and equity researchers as the city strives to police more fairly.

Charlottesville Chief of Police RaShall Brackney emphasized the importance of data analysis in changing the city's policing during a joint forum Tuesday with the Center for Policing Equity.

The virtual event featured Brackney in conversation with Tracie L. Keesee, a veteran of the Denver Police Department and co-founder of the Center for Policing Equity, a research center analyzes police data to determine disparities.

Over the course of an hour and a half, Brackney and Keesee discussed police accountability, the role of data, transparency and community calls for accessible and complete data.

According to Keesee, the Center for Policing Equity — or CPE — was founded more than a decade ago with the goal of using science and data to address race in policing by changing situations through data and the stories it can tell rather than perspectives through stories alone. The research center partners

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ANDREW SHURTLEFF, THE DAILY PROGRESS

Melinda Crawford with the Charlottesville Airport Authority (right) listens to Virginia Senator Tim Kaine (left) during a tour of the new air carrier ramp expansion, and a new taxiway Tuesday at the Charlottesville-Albemarle Airport. The two projects were funded by the Federal Aviation Administration.

Kaine talks infrastructure bill at airport

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More passengers — and more destinations — are returning to the Charlottesville-Albemarle Airport, and the airport is readying itself for takeoff in a post-pandemic business environment.

U.S. Sen. Tim Kaine toured the airport Tuesday afternoon to discuss the Senate-approved \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure plan and how it could help CHO.

"We want to make sure that our airports are ready to grow and ready to succeed as we come out of the pandemic," Kaine said. "The funding in the infrastructure bill ... will provide sizable funding for Virginia's airports,

so that as people are starting to travel again — and I think there's huge pent-up demand — our airports will be ready to go."

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act was approved by the Senate earlier this month, and Kaine said he thinks the multi-purpose infrastructure bill will pass the House and go to the President's desk by the end of September.

"[It] could be the biggest investment in infrastructure that we've made as a nation since the interstate highway system in the late 1950s," he said.

Melinda Crawford, the airport's executive director, said the airport has been working on a terminal area master plan,

which will help direct the airport authority in the best way to utilize federal and state money, along with airport revenues, to expand the terminal building, as well as the airport's parking, rental car facilities and plane-side infrastructure.

She said getting funding for large projects without having to go into a lot of debt will be important, because the debt will have to stay open for projects where federal funding cannot be used, such as around parking.

A key project will be a terminal expansion, Crawford said, as well as improvements around the control tower, built in 1970.

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CLASSIFIEDS B9 ENTERTAINMENT B5 LOCAL & STATE A3 OBITUARIES A10 SCOREBOARD B2
COMICS B8 FOOD B6 NATION & WORLD A4 OPINION A5 SPORTS B1



Parents changing minds on in-person school

KATE MASTERS
The Virginia Mercury

RICHMOND — It seemed like the pandemic had finally reached a turning point when Melissa Yeager made a decision about the upcoming fall semester.

Families with Richmond Public Schools had until June 1 to choose between enrolling virtually or attending classes in person. At that point in the summer, COVID-19 vaccines were widely available to adults, new cases had dropped to less than 200 a day, and almost no one had heard of delta, the highly transmissible variant that now accounts for virtually all new infections across the U.S.

“It seemed like we were not at the end of things, but that there was an end coming,” Yeager said. Her four children — none of whom is old enough to be vaccinated — had managed a year of remote school fairly well. But the encouraging outlook convinced Yeager to enroll them in-person.

By the time cases began climbing, it was too late to change her mind. The vast majority of Virginia school divisions, including Richmond, required families to make a decision about the upcoming semester in late May or early June. Virtual enrollment is now closed, and many are denying an influx of requests from parents and students who changed their minds.

Yeager is one of hundreds of families stuck with face-to-face learning even as a third coronavirus surge casts a pall over the school year. Some districts have already quarantined dozens — or hundreds — of students after COVID-19 exposures. Earlier this week, the Virginia Department of Health urged Amherst County to

temporarily close all its secondary schools after an outbreak in the district.

But local divisions are limited in how widely, and for how long, they can close schools thanks to a state law mandating in-person instruction (passed in the early, and optimistic, days of Virginia’s vaccine rollout). Late last summer, a spike in cases spurred the majority of districts to reopen with hybrid or fully remote learning plans. This year, with new infections reaching even higher levels, they don’t have that option.

Nor are they required to offer remote instruction. “While school divisions need to provide five days of in-person learning to any family who wants it for their students in the fall, school districts are not obligated to provide a virtual option for all students,” Fairfax County reminded families in May. The vast majority of them — 110 out of 132 local divisions — are using Virtual Virginia, a state-run program with its own teachers and curriculum.

Ten districts aren’t offering any virtual option at all, according to Charles Pyle, a spokesperson for the Virginia Department of Education. And some divisions providing their own virtual courses have even tighter restrictions. Fairfax County, for example, is limiting remote learning to students with medical needs documented by a licensed health professional. The deadline to enroll in the program was May 28, and a little more than 400 students, out of roughly 180,000 across the district, are participating.

“Family health/medical conditions are not considered for this program and eligibility is not extended to siblings or other

students in a household,” spokesperson Kathleen Miller wrote in a statement on Friday. “Enrolling additional students would require additional staffing, which has already been a significant challenge.”

Providing both in-person and virtual learning, as many schools have done over the course of the pandemic, have created escalating burdens for local divisions — even with millions of dollars in federal aid. In addition to teacher burnout, administrators have struggled to find enough staff to fill instructional and support positions, especially with regular exposures forcing many into quarantine. In a presentation to lawmakers last fall, state Superintendent James Lane described staffing as one of the biggest challenges facing Virginia’s schools.

Those ongoing needs, combined with the state mandate, offer few incentives for schools to continue providing their own remote learning options. Brian Mott, the executive director for Virtual Virginia, said enrollment in the program was open to any student until their district’s deadline. But he also said planning needs made it difficult to accommodate a wave of later registrations.

“We’ve got to make sure we have the appropriate staff to support them,” Mott said. “The other reason is communication. Students don’t just enroll and start the next day. We need to be setting them up and supporting them as soon as possible.”

Many local districts are also limiting virtual enrollment to students who can show they were successful with the modality — another process that takes time, he added. Despite the di-

vision-wide policies to curb late registrations, though, that’s exactly what’s happening across the state. Mott said there have been more than 1,200 enrollment requests from individual schools in recent weeks, most of which involve multiple students.

Virtual Virginia is offering a “limited number” of late enrollment slots, with a priority on students with medical needs, students from military families, or transfers who entered a school division after the cut-off date, Pyle said. But some individual districts are seeing even higher demand.

The waitlist for Henrico’s Virtual Academy now sits at more than 3,000 students — an increase of around 800 compared with two weeks prior, the Henrico Citizen reported.

The district is attempting to hire more teachers to accommodate the waitlist, according to the Citizen. Other divisions, though, are simply denying the requests.

“Students who have not chosen the virtual option will not be permitted to change to virtual,” said Diana Gulotta, a spokesperson for Prince William County Schools, the second-largest division in the state. “Those with documented health conditions can apply for homebound services.”

Unlike Fairfax County, which is Virginia’s largest school district, Prince William isn’t currently requiring its staff to be vaccinated.

Richmond is another division mandating vaccines for its staff, and Yeager said that’s provided her with some degree of comfort. But while she understands the constraints facing local school districts, she’s frustrated — like many families — over the lack of flexibility amid a constantly

changing pandemic.

Delta has changed the conversation, she said. Research on earlier variants indicated that children were less susceptible to COVID-19 than adults and displayed milder symptoms when they contracted the virus. But the rise of delta has corresponded with worrying reports of increasing pediatric cases and hospitalizations, especially in hard-hit areas. Ballad Health, for example — the primary hospital system in far southwestern Virginia — has reported several COVID-19 admissions in their pediatric ICU.

“We are seeing children dying, though I know, intellectually, the chances of that happening are very small,” Yeager said. It’s still not clear if delta presents any more of a risk to children than previous variants. Public health experts have pointed out that pediatric hospitalizations are still the same proportion of the total, but that the overall number is rising given the higher transmissibility of the variant.

Right now, though, delta poses the greatest risk to the unvaccinated — a population that still includes children under 12. Authorization for that age group isn’t expected before the end of this year, according to some federal officials. And many parents aren’t willing to take the risk.

“I would love to be wrong,” Yeager said. “But delta is so terribly infectious. Kids can’t be masked all the time. I don’t see how it’s going to be other than ... I can’t even think of a polite way to put it.”

The Virginia Mercury is a nonprofit, nonpartisan online news outlet based in Richmond covering state government and policy.

Masks

From A1

“It’s trying to get your toddler to wear a mask,” she said. “If the toddler feels like it, they do it and if they don’t, they don’t. It’s not viciousness; it’s not meanness. You can explain until you are blue in the face but the toddler is going to take the mask off.”

She’s also worried about what would happen if Daniel had a seizure while wearing a mask. The epilepsy has impaired Daniel’s language skills, so he wouldn’t be able to ask for help. Volodin said Daniel used to talk and now doesn’t say anything at all.

Students in the virtual school will receive instruction on wearing a mask and to help them become more comfortable with the face covering. After they demonstrate online that they are developing the skill of mask wearing, they are invited into a school for an hour or two at a time until they are able to attend full-time, Giaramita said. If a student is never comfortable wearing a mask, then, according to current policy, that student would remain in the virtual school, which launched this school year.

Since the school division started planning for this school year, officials have said time and time again that in-person schooling is the preferred option and key to helping students to make up for unfinished learning.

As of the first week, 414 of 13,858 students were enrolled in the virtual school, and fewer than 20 were in the school because of mask issues. Giaramita didn’t specify how many of those students are part of the special education program.

Charles Pyle, spokesman for the Virginia Department of Education, said school divisions are responsible for implementing the public health order, just as in the case of a state law.

At the Virginia Institute of Autism’s James C. Hormel School, students are exempted from wearing a mask without a doctor’s note, director Jessica Doucette said. Staff at the school are working with students to desensitize them to a face covering, so they can at least ride a school bus.

Amy Walters, a lawyer with the Legal Aid Justice Center, said that the school division should assess each child individually to determine whether it is possible to accommodate their disability and make an exception to the general mask policy.

Walters and Legal Aid are working with several families who have



Vera Volodin, an Albemarle County parent, with her children and husband. Volodin’s 13-year-old son Daniel, wearing an orange shirt, is unable to wear a mask because of a medical condition and developmental disability. Albemarle County school division current mask policy does not make exceptions for students like Daniel.

been assigned to virtual learning because of the mask policy, but she said she hasn’t heard from people in other school districts where this is a problem.

“There are other ways to mitigate risk, such as distancing, testing, minimal contacts, and private placement, and the school system remains responsible for ensuring all children with disabilities make appropriate educational progress,” Walters said. “For children who are unable to comply with masks due to their disability but also are not likely to benefit from virtual school, accommodations to the mask policy are warranted.”

Experts have said since the pandemic began that virtual schooling would have a disproportionate effect on students with disabilities because of the support and structure that an in-person school day provides that can’t be replicated online. State and federal special education laws were not suspended during the pandemic, meaning that schools were still obligated to provide services spelled out in a student’s individual education plan, a legal document.

Beyond the logistical concerns, Volodin is worried because virtual learning didn’t work for Daniel. A typical school day for Daniel would involve short tasks followed by rewards and breaks of 15 to 20 minutes. Some of the tasks

are focused on life skills such as brushing his teeth, putting on deodorant and using a fork to eat — skills that can’t be taught virtually.

Volodin said she won’t agree to virtual instruction for Daniel.

“When he’s having a good day, he is very interactive and happy,” she said. “He loves to give high fives. He’s a happy kid. He loves looking at his books. He has his favorite books to look at. But when he’s having a rough day, it’s rough and somebody needs to be near him in case he seizes to catch him. He rests a lot if he’s having a rough day.”

When schools closed in the spring 2020, the division gave her an iPad to support virtual learning.

“I was doing it,” she said. “He doesn’t care. He’s not going to sit there. The teacher was reading a story, and he’s like, ‘I’m not interested,’ and he wanders off. Because that’s Daniel. He might have actually sat and listened to the story in-person.”

Daniel went back to school September 2020 as part of the first group of students who had access to the buildings, and he didn’t wear a mask for most of the time, she said, except when walking to and from his classroom.

This year was a different story. Volodin was told that Daniel

would need to wear a mask, and after four days of trying, the division determined that he would have to go to the virtual school.

Giaramita said that division staff are aware that some students may have been allowed in school unmasked last year.

“As well-meaning as the rationale behind this may have been, it did not constitute an approved exemption,” he said. “It did alert us to the need to be more consistent in the way in which we made clear and monitored the mask requirement. If there is a difference this year, it is that the policy is being followed as written.”

But, the policy in question also changed. Last school year, students could be exempted by the school principal because of a documented medical condition, developmental or other disability. The superintendent or special education director also could exempt students because of special behavioral or individualized needs.

This school year, “students with a documented medical condition or developmental, behavioral, or other disability that prevents them from wearing a mask or face covering will be offered an alternative education program,” according to the revised policy that the School Board approved July 8.

That alternative education

program is the division’s virtual school, Giaramita said.

For students who are uncomfortable wearing a mask in the building, schools are providing accommodations such as mask breaks, taking students for walks outside the school when they need relief from wearing a mask and increasing the amount of outdoor instruction, Giaramita said.

Volodin had an meeting with the individualized education program team Tuesday to discuss the virtual placement. The division didn’t change its overall stance, though school staff in the meeting discussed ways to bring Daniel into the building to help with mask wearing and follow the policy, including allowing him to come into the building for two hours a day to work on masking, she said. Volodin rejected the two-hour option.

Dezyana Walker received a similar message during an IEP meeting last week, which she called to discuss her four-year-old’s placement. School officials told her on the first day of school that her daughter needs to do virtual learning and mask training. Walker had to pick up her daughter, Malaya Shore, from Woodbrook Elementary on the first day of school because she wouldn’t keep a mask on.

Malaya has severe autism and is part of the early childhood special education program, Walker said.

Walker is working with Legal Aid and hasn’t agreed to virtual learning yet. She said she asked if her daughter could attend the Virginia Institute of Autism’s day school, which the school system would have to pay for, but that request was dismissed.

“She’s special needs,” Walker said. “She does not have the attention span to do virtual learning.”

Malaya attended school in Waynesboro last year for a few days a week and a few hours at a time. This year was supposed to be her first experience with full-time schooling, which Walker hoped would help Malaya get into a school routine.

So far, Walker feels frustrated and unheard by the division, she said. The last week has been stressful and nerve-wracking as she works to get her daughter back into school and set up therapy services through the Virginia Institute of Autism. She also has a one-year-old to take care of.

“The main thing that I’m trying to do is get her in-person and in school,” she said. “Again, she’s special needs and has a disability. She needs to be in-person getting her services instead of virtually.”

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Taking the mystery out of masking

Children dealing with disabilities were initially told they couldn't come to school with no mask

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Albemarle County is letting students with disabilities come into school buildings to practice masking after a reinterpretation of the division's mask policy.

Children who were previously told they would have to attend virtual school if they couldn't wear

a mask have since been allowed to work on mask-wearing skills with their teachers in-person — a process known as desensitization that involves slowly exposing the student to the mask for increasing amounts of time and intensity while rewarding students as they tolerate the face covering.

Megan Atthowe, a behavior analyst with the division's special education department, said the division has seen that students' communication difficulties and sensory sensitivities can be barriers to wearing a mask and that it's really a skill deficit that a lot of students have.

"So we're asking them to wear

a mask, to do this skill that's difficult, and come into school where we have all these other mitigation strategies that are new and difficult, and to come in and learn all the new skills that you typically would learn in a school environment, so it's really a lot to ask of a child," she said. "We want children to be safe at school, and we also want to support them to be successful while they're getting safe."

The division's current policy requiring that all students, staff members and visitors wear a face covering when indoors says that those with a documented medical condition or disability that prevents them from wearing a

mask will be offered an alternative education program. Initially, that meant virtual learning for some students. However, schools have been able to accommodate students in this category by creating outdoor learning spaces and socially distanced spaces indoors, parents have said in interviews and at School Board meetings.

"The issue has been how our mask policy was being interpreted," division spokesman Phil Giaramita said. "Virtual instruction was seen as the alternative to immediate, all-day mask wearing. Given the input from parents, it was important to offer a way that

would make it possible for a student to be in-person and to become comfortable wearing a mask at a comfortable pace."

The division recently teamed up with the Virginia Institute of Autism to help students and families with mask wearing. The partnership produced a how-to video that was sent to families earlier this week. It shows VIA and school division members working to help a child become accustomed to wearing a mask. The division is also planning to host workshops and informational sessions as part of the joint effort.

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ERIN EDGERTON PHOTOS, THE DAILY PROGRESS

Jill Trischman-Marks, Botanical Garden of the Piedmont Executive Director, leads a tour for the garden's future plans Thursday at the Botanical Garden of the Piedmont site.

Facebook unveiling controls for kids

ANNE D'INNOCENZIO
Associated Press

NEW YORK — In the aftermath of damning testimony that its platforms harm children, Facebook said Sunday it will be introducing several features including prompting teens to take a break using its photo sharing app Instagram, and "nudging" teens if they are repeatedly looking at the same content that's not conducive to their well-being.

The Menlo Park, California-based Facebook is also planning to introduce new optional controls for parents or guardians of teens so they can supervise what their teens are doing online. These initiatives come after Facebook announced late last month that it was pausing work on its Instagram for Kids project. But critics say the plan lacks details and they are skeptical that the new features would be effective.

The new controls were outlined on Sunday by Nick Clegg, Facebook's vice president for global affairs, who made the rounds on various Sunday news shows including CNN's "State of the Union" and ABC's "This Week with George Stephanopoulos" where he was grilled about Facebook's use of algorithms as well as its role in spreading harmful misinformation ahead of the Jan. 6 Capitol riots.

"We are constantly iterating in order to improve our products," Clegg told Dana Bash on "State of the Union" Sunday. "We cannot, with a wave of the wand, make everyone's life perfect. What we can do is improve our products, so that our products are as safe and as enjoyable to use."

Clegg said that Facebook has invested \$13 billion over the past few years in making sure to keep the platform safe and that the company has 40,000 people working on these issues. And while Clegg said that Facebook has done its best to keep harmful content out of its platforms, he said he was open for more regulation and oversight.

"We need greater transparency," he told CNN's Bash. He noted that the systems that

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Putting down roots

Botanical Garden of the Piedmont given long-term deal by city

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A botanical garden may begin to see new life soon after the Charlottesville City Council voted last week to officially lease the site to the Botanical Garden of the Piedmont for at least 40 years.

The Botanical Garden of the Piedmont began in 2008 as McIntire Botanical Garden, which was established as a 501c3 nonprofit organization with the purpose of educating the community about the benefits of a botanical garden, said Jill Trischman-Marks, executive director. The garden is located at the corner of John Warner Parkway and Melbourne Road, across from the Charlottesville High School football field.

In 2012, the city started a master plan process for McIntire Park East to determine what to do with the site. Once a golf course, it had become a leaf



A butterfly lands on a flower Thursday at the Botanical Garden of the Piedmont site.

mulch pile. The city received input from the community through public feedback sessions.

"The public has made it known that the canopy garden was a desired use for the garden for the park," Trischman-Marks said. As a result, the city designated 8.5 acres for the botanical botanical garden, but that's where the taxpayer burden ends.

"The city was particularly interested in having a botanical

garden because one of their goals is to be considered a green city, but also Parks and Rec was offering all kinds of programming but they didn't have the capacity to offer environmental education. And so that was basically one of our jobs to do that for the city, to make sure that that was being offered to the citizens of Charlottesville," she said.

"Our job is to raise the funds to design, construct and maintain

it. And once it is built, all of those features that we had raised the funds for would then become the property of the city of Charlottesville, and they will have to maintain it," Trischman-Marks said.

The Botanical Garden of the Piedmont started stewarding the area and working on the beginnings of a garden in 2019. The initial work was more about cleaning and clearing than gardening.

"The first thing we had to do was get the garbage out, and there were mattresses and tires and things, of course we're still finding garbage here. We had to hire a forestry mulcher because it was so dense, but once we got in there and started clearing out, we then started creating trails," Trischman-Marks said.

The group also removed invasive plants that disrupted the natural habitat. As the project grows, the organization will plant native plant species as well as plants that are known to adapt well to the local environment. That, in turn will bring more animals native to the environment.

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CLASSIFIEDS B6 & 7 ENTERTAINMENT B4 LOCAL & STATE A3 OBITUARIES A8 SCOREBOARD B3
COMICS B5 HEALTH A6 NATION & WORLD A4 OPINION A5 SPORTS B1



Apex sells majority stake to investment firm

FROM STAFF REPORTS

A majority interest in Charlottesville-based Apex Clean Energy has been sold by the company to a global investment firm with which Apex has worked in the past.

Ares Management Corporation on Wednesday announced that it has agreed to acquire a majority stake in Apex, a home-grown clean energy corporation that is currently building its corporate headquarters near downtown Charlottesville.

Apex's existing management team will continue to lead the company, officials said.

The purchase will allow Apex to fund its move to enter the utility market as a renewable energy power producer.

"There is a deep, long-standing relationship between Ares and Apex, which gives us great confidence and excitement about this opportunity," said Keith Derman, of Ares' Infrastructure and Power, in a prepared

statement. "Apex has an industry-leading renewables business that positions our investors at the forefront of the energy transition in North America."

"Apex and Ares are aligned on a common mission to accelerate the shift to clean energy," said Mark Goodwin, president and chief executive officer of Apex Clean Energy, also in a prepared statement. "The energy transition has never been more urgent, and the opportunity

presented by the industry's momentum is both immediate and massive."

Apex has brought online more than \$9 billion of utility-scale projects. It has a large and diverse portfolio of clean energy projects with more in development. It is a leader in clean energy sales to commercial and industrial markets in the last decade.

Ares infrastructure and power fund has worked with Apex on numerous power projects, including the largest single-phase, single-site

wind farm in the United States.

"Apex has grown over the past decade to meet this moment, and the infusion of growth capital provided by this agreement will allow the company to strengthen its leadership position in U.S. utility-scale, clean energy development, operate projects as a [provider] and accelerate strategic expansion into energy storage, distributed energy resources, and green fuels," Goodwin said in a statement.

Masks

From A1

Giaramita said the partnership came together as the new school year began when it became evident that mask-wearing was going to be difficult for children, especially those in the special education program.

"In practice, it also made sense to do all we could to make it possible for [special education] students to be in-person in school," he said.

The tips in the how-to video can apply to all students, but Giaramita said that the emphasis with the VIA partnership is on meeting the greatest need, which is in the special education program.

VIA, which runs a school for students with autism, has been working on mask desensitization with their students since early in the pandemic.

"It's basically starting where the student tolerates the masks, whether that's in front of them, on a table or actually over their nose and mouth," said Shonnet Brand of the Virginia Institute of Autism. "Wherever that point is, that's where we start. Then we slowly increase the amount of time, the end goal being that they can wear it all day to be able to access their education or to be able to get together with family members or friends in a safe way in the community."

Brand said VIA tells parents to follow the three Ps — patience, persistence and positivity — when working on masking and other skills.

"Because it doesn't happen overnight; it can take a long time," Brand said, adding that the process does work and that VIA has seen several success stories.

Teaching and reinforcing the skill also requires a partnership between parents and the schools, officials said.

Atthowe said the school system is employing several of the same techniques that VIA has seen success with — breaking the mask-wearing skill into small steps, gradually building on each as a student tolerates it.

"We're really looking at how to help students feel more relaxed while they're wearing a mask and make it be as positive of an experience as possible, as opposed to something that's really stressful or unpleasant," she said. "Every child is different. ... So we would want to make sure that we're partnering with the family and seeing what the needs are there and then really getting

to know the specific needs of each child in their classroom and their setting."

'Kids like him adapt'

Billy Gorman started working on mask-wearing with his son, Desi, in the early days of the pandemic. Desi, who is on the autism spectrum, is a sixth-grader at Henley Middle School this year.

To help him learn to wear a mask, Gorman said he would wear a mask himself when out in public places, such as the grocery store, and correct Desi if the covering slipped below his nose. They also experimented with different types of masks to find one that was comfortable.

"He had to practice at it and get better at it like most kids," he said. "... But he works around it and adapts to it. I just have to remind myself that kids adapt and kids like him adapt. And he did for a large part."

Desi didn't attend classes in-person last year. Heading into this school year, Gorman said the family wasn't sure how Desi would do in school wearing the mask all day.

"You prepare him for everything," Gorman said.

Those efforts paid off: Desi is doing well this school year.

"He loves school; he loves all the kids," Gorman said. "He wants to be here. So that's probably a big motivator for him to do what he needs to do in school."

Taylor Evancho, a special education teacher at Henley in the C-BASE program, said students in her class have been doing well. Teachers and aides in the classroom use a range of tools such as if/then statements, regular reminders and positive reinforcement to help students learn to wear a mask.

"We have great success with that," Evancho said. "We do go outside to take mask breaks, play group games. We try to eat lunch out there just so that we're not always wearing the mask."

The C-BASE program is self-contained, meaning that students spend most of their day in one classroom, and designed for students with significant intellectual disability, who require intensive assistance to learn the curriculum standards. Evancho works with 13 students along with another C-BASE teacher.

"We have students that are great with it, some that need reminding, and some that we're just kind of targeting," she said. "Let's just practice being at school with a mask on before we do anything else. Everybody is

doing great. The kids are all working with us."

Evancho said there's a socially-distanced space in the classroom where students who are struggling can practice mask-wearing.

"I would just say reinforcement would be our biggest thing," she said, adding that she and the parents are trading information as they find out what works for students.

One of the Henley C-BASE students is Daniel Volodin, whose mom spoke to The Daily Progress in late August about her son's challenges with masking and the division's policy. On Sept. 7, Daniel resumed full-time in-person classes following a short break after the school created a socially-distanced space where he could work on masking.

"With the aide constantly reminding him to wear it, he does wear it now," said Vera Volodin, Daniel's mom. "But it's not like he actually understands what he's doing."

Daniel, 13, has autism and epilepsy and is developmentally at the level of an 18-month-old, Volodin said. Early in the school year, Volodin was told that Daniel would have to attend virtual school until he could wear a mask all day or come into the school a few hours a day to work on the skill. Those options didn't work for the family, in which both parents work full-time.

Volodin praised Daniel's teacher, Alexa Bolden, for doing everything she could to help find a solution.

'Complete luck'

Alison Nagel's four-year-old son, Carter, is now attending VIA classes full-time because of the division's initial enforcement of the mask policy. Her son was in the early childhood special education program at Brownsville Elementary and struggles to wear a mask.

In addition to having autism, Carter has facial paralysis as a result of Moebius Syndrome, a rare condition. He was also born with Pierre Robin Sequence, which meant that his jaw and chin were recessed, blocking his

airway.

"So he's had numerous surgeries over his little tiny lifespan to open his airway and allow for healthy breathing," she said.

The early childhood special education classes at Brownsville are blended, meaning they include students who are not in special education.

Nagel said she received a call from Brownsville administrators on Sept. 9 regarding Carter's challenges with wearing a mask. She said she was told then that the school would monitor his mask-wearing for four days and document any progress. But if he wasn't able to wear a mask all day, he wouldn't be allowed back in school.

Carter attended Brownsville last year and worked on wearing a mask with his teachers then as well.

"But he does not keep his mask on, and everybody knew that," she said. "... So when we sent him to school this year, we assumed it would be similar: that it was a goal but not an exclusion criterion."

She talked about her concerns regarding the mask policy at a School Board meeting last month.

Because she wasn't sure how often Carter would be able to attend school, she and her husband decided to send him to VIA full-time. Their insurance is paying for it.

"Our family would be really really in a tough position if we were not protected by layers of privilege and not every family has that," Nagel said.

Nagel said that she was shocked after receiving the phone call from Brownsville administrators and felt like her son was being excluded from an opportunity because of his disability. She then reached out to VIA where her son was going a few days a week, and a coordinator there managed to get Carter into a full-time slot.

"It was honestly complete luck," she said. Carter started at VIA full-time the week of Sept. 13, so he didn't miss out on any in-person learning.

VIA is a better place for

Carter, Nagel said. The whole situation has made Nagel rethink whether he'll return to the county school system.

"Unfortunately, what this experience has shown me is that the county really has some big holes in what they'll be able to do for my son," she said. "It has really made me re-examine what his educational future is going to look like in the county at all. So that was a big wake up call."

Nagel said she would like to see the School Board discuss the experiences of students with disabilities more in-depth and focus on this group.

"I think until that happens, I don't know whether they really had the best interests of my kid in mind," she said.

Dezyana Walker's four-year-old daughter, Malaya Shore, is currently going to VIA full-time but will split her time between VIA and Woodbrook Elementary starting later this month. Walker, who also previously spoke with The Daily Progress, said division administrators offered the hybrid option during a meeting at the end of September.

Walker initially requested in a meeting in late August that her daughter attend VIA but that request didn't move forward, she said. During the intervening month between IEP meetings, Malaya was at home with her while she worked with The Legal Aid Justice Center to figure out a solution.

Drs. Rachelle and Michael Keng shared their story at the Sept. 9 Albemarle County School Board. Their third-grade daughter at Stone-Robinson has Angelman's Syndrome, which means she has seizures and other physical disabilities and can't communicate verbally. Because of that, she

struggles to wear a mask.

"The day before school started, we received a phone call that our daughter would not be able to attend school because she was not able to keep a mask on," Rachelle Keng said. "We're offered virtual school as the only option, which we know caused regression for our daughter last year."

Stone-Robinson staff members created an outdoor learning space for their daughter, they told board members. However, they were concerned about the sustainability of that solution, especially with cooler weather on the way.

At the meeting, they requested to join the group of physicians who are advising the division on COVID-19 safety measures to discuss options such as large, ventilated indoor spaces. Rachelle Keng is an obstetrician and gynecologist affiliated with Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital while Michael Keng works as a hematologist at the University of Virginia Medical Center.

"We recognize that our children are a minority of the student body," Michael Keng said. "We also recognize the safety of all those involved is paramount. But let us work together as a team to think of creative solutions that do not discriminate nor punish our children. Please remember that children who are severely affected by your mask policies."

Giaramita said the Kengs were invited to address the Student Health Advisory Board, which led to a partnership with Kevin Kirst, the division's director of special education and student services, that aided the collaboration with VIA.

The Kengs could not be reached for additional comment beyond what they told the School Board.

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Changes wanted in mask policy

Legal Aid, parents say that it discriminates

KATHERINE KNOTT
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Albemarle County's mask policy discriminates against students with disabilities and needs to be revised, parents and the Legal Aid Justice Center recently told the county School Board.

"The current mask policy has created an untenable situation for all, especially for students with disabilities," said Heather Tower, who has a son with autism at Albemarle High School.

Her son, who doesn't communicate verbally, is likely claustrophobic, which makes wearing a mask a challenge.

"In totality, the past six and a half weeks, his teacher has been working almost exclusively on mask wearing from nine to four daily, which is seven hours of forced discomfort on a docile child who is nonverbal," Tower said. "This is the same child who has refused to wear a mask and goggles while skiing in cold Vermont winters the past seven years."

Tower and several other others shared their concerns regarding the mask policy during Thursday's School Board meeting and asked

for a more individual approach to the issue of masking in order to take into account a student's individual needs.

That's what is currently happening, the division said in a statement Monday.

"Every child is entitled to the opportunity to learn at their highest potential," division officials said. "We take very seriously our responsibilities to work with each family to provide all the accommodations needed to deliver to every child, meaningful learning experiences while protecting the health of our students and staff."

The mask policy, which requires that everyone in a school building

wear a mask while inside, says that students with a documented medical condition or disability that prevents them from wearing a mask will be offered an alternative education program. The policy doesn't specify what the alternative program is.

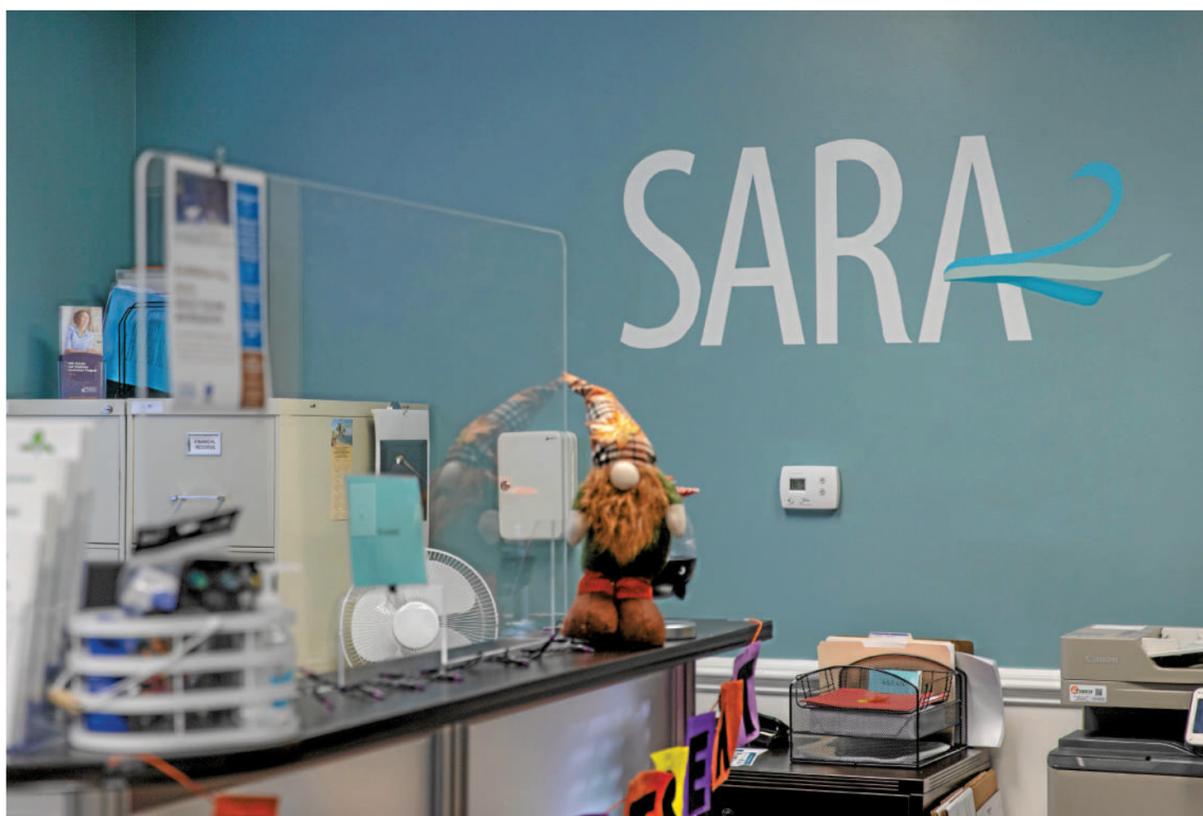
The division has recently re-interpreted its mask policy to allow students with disabilities to come into the buildings to work on mask-wearing. Previously, students were told they would have to stay home until they could wear a mask all day.

According to the statement, division officials discussed the mask policy with the Student Health

Advisory Board, which includes local medical professionals. That group recommended changes to the accommodation and mitigation practices for students unable to wear masks full-time while in school.

"We since have successfully been working with the small number of special education families and students for whom the masking policy was a difficult challenge," officials said in a statement. "We added to several of our mitigation practices, the wearing of N-95 masks for staff, the use of face shields and goggles by staff,

Please see **POLICY**, Page A7



ERIN EDGERTON PHOTOS, THE DAILY PROGRESS

The Sexual Assault Resource Agency mission is to eliminate sexual violence and its impact by providing education, advocacy and support to men, women and children.

Helping the healing

Tattoo artists are set to host a fundraiser

BRYAN MCKENZIE
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A cut in state-distributed federal money has left Central Virginia's Sexual Assault Resource Center scrambling for funding, but local tattoo artists hope to give the nonprofit a shot in the arm.

Ben Around Tattoos will host Tattooed for a Cause, a tattoo festival and fundraiser featuring a silent auction at Moose's By

the Creek restaurant this Saturday and Sunday to help SARA overcome more than \$500,000 in cuts.

An online silent auction on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving and a 5 kilometer road race next April are also scheduled to raise funds. SARA saw an estimated \$642,000 cut from its two-year budget through federal Victims of Crime Act grants, which are distributed by the state. Pandemic recovery funds brought in \$70,000 to help offset the losses.

The losses equal about 60% of

Please see **SARA**, Page A3



Renee Branson, Executive Director at SARA, sits for a portrait Monday at the Sexual Assault Resource Agency.

Candidates disclose fundraising amounts

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Candidates running for Charlottesville City Council raised \$35,000 last month as their campaigns entered the home stretch, according to campaign finance reports.

Brian Pinkston, a Democrat, continued to lead the council candidates in fundraising, bringing in \$20,589.45 from Sept. 1 to Sept. 30. Pinkston has \$14,399.59 on hand, according to the report filed Oct. 15 with the Virginia Department of Elections.



Pinkston

Fellow Democratic nominee Juandiego Wade raised \$14,636.50 with \$15,201.24 on hand. Independent challenger Yas Washington raised \$100 this period with no cash on hand.

There are two seats on the Charlottesville City Council on the ballot this election cycle. The field of candidates narrowed early last month after Mayor Nikuyah Walker withdrew from the election. Walker raised no money last month before dropping out Sept. 8 and ended her campaign with \$90.40 on hand, according to the report.

None of the three Albemarle County Board of Supervisors races is contested this year, but that hasn't stopped the candidates from raising money. Jim Andrews, who is seeking to represent the Samuel Miller district, has \$21,774.21 on hand after raising the bulk of his money in the spring when he announced his campaign. Campaign finance reports show that most of the money is being spent on

Please see **FUNDRAISING**, Page A8

ASK DR. PETRI

Sometimes vaccine isn't enough



WILLIAM A. PETRI
University of Virginia School of Medicine

Dr. William A. Petri, an immunologist at the University of Virginia School of Medicine, answers this week's questions from readers on COVID-19. Dr. Petri will keep dishing on COVID-19 and

answering your questions each week in *The Daily Progress* for as long as you have questions. Send them to Editor Lynne Anderson at: vanderson@dailyprogress.com, and she will forward them to Dr. Petri.

1. Why did the COVID-19 vaccine fail to protect Colin Powell?

I think we are all saddened by the loss of such a great American, someone who served with distinction for the U.S. for his

entire adult life and broke so many barriers to advancement for Blacks in the military and in public service. We will never know why the vaccine failed, but General Powell had many risk factors for more severe COVID-19: his age of 84, being a male and having multiple myeloma increased the risk of death from COVID-19 by several hundredfold. As far as breakthrough infections with the COVID-19 vaccines,

we know that even with the delta variant surge that these remain uncommon (i.e., the vaccine remains highly but not completely effective), thus the recent recommendation for

Please see **PETRI**, Page A7

■ **INSIDE:** Colin Powell, general and statesman, dies at 84 from COVID-related complications. Page A4

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Policy

From A1

a doubling of our air filtration system protections in special ed classrooms, the use of outdoor learning spaces, smaller groupings of students and a graduated approach to increasing the skills and comfort level of students in wearing a mask.”

The division said that the response from families to “this work in progress” has been positive.

“Children who were not in school on a consistent basis are now in school,” officials said in the statement. “The support of their families has made it possible to utilize an individualized approach for each student, tailored to meet their own unique needs and comfort level with mask wearing.”

Early into this school year, parents started raising concerns with the policy and its implementation.

State and federal orders relating to mask requirements exempt students with disabilities. Additionally, state and federal special education laws were not suspended during the pandemic, meaning that schools were still obligated to provide services spelled out in a student’s individual education plan, a legal document.

Recently, LAJC prepared a civil rights complaint in response to the division’s policy but did not file it because the school system started accommodating and including students. Instead, Legal Aid is advocating for the division to change the policy to comply with the law and ensure all students with disabilities are accommodated and included.

The reinterpretation doesn’t change the underlying problems with the policy, which the School Board adopted in July, a Legal Aid representative said in a prepared



Heather Tower, an Albemarle County parent, addresses that School Board at Thursday’s meeting regarding her concerns with the division’s mask policy and how it affects students with disabilities.

statement read at the meeting.

“While this week’s Daily Progress article made it seem like this issue has been resolved, there continue to be students who are not accessing their special education and related services due to their disabilities and the existing mask policy,” said Spencer Haydary, a University of Virginia Law student working with Legal Aid. “Moreover, the written policy has not changed, but it needs to. The board needs to revise its policy if it is to ensure that Albemarle is for all learners.”

Haydary said that to resolve the issues with the policy, Legal Aid asked that the division allow for an “individualized determination of what reasonable accommodations are appropriate to allow students to access their special education and related services while keeping everyone safe.”

Additionally, Legal Aid asked that the school division no longer automatically relegate students with disabilities to an alternative education program if they are not able to wear a mask because of their disability. The organization also wants to see the division utilize other COVID-19 mitigation strategies such as increasing op-

portunities for outdoor learning, physical distancing, testing, better ventilation, minimal contacts, and private placement.

The School Board did not discuss the public comments during its meeting.

For Tower, the mask requirement has meant her son Jonathan is working on mask-wearing all day at school rather than his educational goals.

“Currently his teachers and staff are stuck between a rock and a hard place as they diligently work to follow the current blanket mask policy that’s required of them, and they’re continually placing the mask over our son’s face and he rips it off within seconds,” Tower said. “And after more than 18 months of practice, his ability to wear it while in a seated learning position is 30 to 60 seconds.”

Tower said that the division’s mask policy is preventing Jonathan from receiving a free and appropriate public education, which is the federal standard for students identified as having a disability.

“We would like to request that the board revise the current mask policy in order to fully integrate

all student populations including students of different abilities,” Tower said. “Special education administration’s aware of the problem and the fact they’re not in compliance with federal IDEA law.”

One mother, Janice Mills, said that her daughter’s services only began six weeks into the school year after she retained legal counsel.

“Until I showed up with legal counsel, none of my daughter’s IEP goals were being worked on, like everyone else was mentioned, and none of her IEP mandated therapies have been started,” Mills said. “... Once we had an emergency IEP meeting with legal counsel, we were offered the very same accommodations that the county had denied us for the previous six weeks. So, the truth of the matter is that students with complex needs — all the students that we’re talking about — are really best served in person, especially after having been out of school for a year with the pandemic.”

Mills’ daughter attends the county school division’s Post High program, which is geared toward students ages 18 to 22 to help them transition from a school setting to adulthood. Her daughter has Angelman’s Syndrome, which has led to neurologic and sensory issues, as well as PTSD from being involved with an Amtrak wreck in 2018.

“So both of those make mask-wearing an extreme challenge for her, even though we’ve worked really hard on it and are continuing to work on it,” Mills said.

Her daughter was sent home after the first week of school because of the mask policy, she said, adding that mask-wearing was the focus of that first week. She

then negotiated an hour in-person twice a week where her daughter could go to Post High and work on mask wearing skills in addition to two 30-minute virtual sessions. Following the emergency IEP meeting, she’ll begin attending in-person, Mills said.

“It shouldn’t have to be this difficult and the exclusions shouldn’t be happening for people who don’t have legal counsel,” she said.

Similar to other speakers, Mills encouraged the division to change its mask policy to allow for an individualized plan to ensure that students have access to special education and related services.

“The current policy automatically excludes students with disabilities, and that needs to be changed,” she said. Rochelle Garwood’s 20-year-old daughter, Laurel, also attends Post High and struggles to wear a mask because of severe sensory issues stemming from a brain injury.

“She absolutely panics when she wears a mask; she just can’t function,” Garwood said. “Her doctor is willing to attest to this. We were told, however, that for Laurel to attend Post High, she must work on wearing a mask.”

She said that Laurel was offered a few Zoom music sessions a week and some virtual physical therapy as an alternative if she couldn’t wear a mask. But she wants her daughter at Post High full-time where she can work on her IEP goals, which include communication.

Garwood said that they would do whatever it took so that people could feel safe around Laurel, who is vaccinated, including regular testing.

“It’s really important to us that she gets back to her IEP,” she said. “... We need to do this in a way that doesn’t traumatize Laurel.”

Petri

From A1

the Pfizer, and likely soon the Moderna and J&J vaccines to be boosted.

2. Should Type 1 diabetics who work in health care work directly with those with active COVID-19? I feel like it’s tempting fate, as they’re more at risk for complications/complicated cases of COVID-19, though not any more likely to get COVID-19 (if their diabetes is well-controlled). Thanks for answering all our COVID-19 questions!

First of all, thank you for being a health care worker. We all as a society owe so much to those who have and continue to provide care during the pandemic, including first responders to nurses, respiratory therapists and physicians. I hope that all of us will look back at 2020–2021 with gratitude to medical care and science for getting us through the pandemic. As far as the risk to health care workers, we are about twofold more likely to contract COVID-19, so your question is well-founded. I personally work with and care for patients with active COVID-19, although I am at somewhat increased risk being 65 years old. I do so in part because the use of PPE and vaccination (including booster) minimizes that risk. However I say that this is a personal decision on my own and your part, as it is key that each of us reach their own level of comfort.

3. Dr. Petri, with mask wearing, social distancing, antibacterial lotion on our hands after every visit to a store, doctor, etc, and then washing our hands when we get home, we haven’t had any colds since the start of the pandemic. But, are these practices weakening our immune systems since there are so few germs to combat? And, if so, is that dangerous? Thank you.

What an interesting question! The short answer is yes in the specific case of influenza. While I would not advise to stop wearing a mask and washing hands, I would recommend that everyone six months of age and older get the flu vaccine and do so soon, certainly before Thanksgiving. Our immunity to influenza may have waned since there was essentially no flu last year. In any case it is always a good idea to get the flu vaccine as it saves lives every year,

maybe even more so for 2021.

4. My daughter got COVID back in May, so feels the antibodies she now has is better protection than the vaccine. But I say the antibodies diminish. Do we know when they diminish, and the rate? I ask in that my 91-year-old mom is coming for Thanksgiving. She will have had the vaccine and booster by then. Will my daughter put my mom at risk, or is it really that my daughter is the one at risk of COVID, and/or the variant? Right now she has no desire to get vaccinated. I am looking for any stronger facts to convince her otherwise. Thank you for taking my question.

I enjoy writing this column as the questions are so good, and I learn so much by reviewing what is known in order to answer them. I like your approach of using facts to convince others of the need for vaccination. The facts here are that vaccination provides about twofold added protection from reinfection in those who have recovered from COVID-19. This was shown in a study out of Kentucky that looked at 738 adults who had PCR-confirmed COVID-19 back in 2020. When the 246 patients who contracted a second COVID-19 infection in May-June 2021 were compared to 492 adults who did not (all of whom also had recovered in 2020 from COVID-19), vaccination reduced the risk of reinfection by 2.3-fold. It is great that your mother will have received the vaccine and booster by Thanksgiving. Having your daughter vaccinated would provide an added layer of security for your mother’s health for this reason. It is also important to remember that people can be infectious without having any symptoms, so while isolating at home is key when one has cold or flu symptoms, this does not entirely prevent transmission.

5. Is the reinfection rate for those who have had COVID-19 greater than the breakthrough infection rate for those who have been immunized?

It most likely is, although I cannot cite chapter and verse with hard data. What practically is important is that vaccination provides added protection to those who have recovered from COVID-19 (as we learned from the study from Kentucky above), and that the Pfizer booster shot provides added protection to those who are six months out from their primary series of vac-



DAVID J. PHILLIP

In 2000, President-elect Bush smiles as he introduces retired Gen. Colin Powell, left, as his nominee to be secretary of state during a ceremony in Crawford, Texas. Powell, former Joint Chiefs chairman and secretary of state, has died from COVID-19 complications. In an announcement on social media Monday, the family said Powell had been fully vaccinated. He was 84.

inations. So it behooves us all to be vaccinated, even if we had COVID-19 in the past, and to receive a booster at six months.

6. With the FDA saying that people who got the Moderna vaccine can still benefit from a booster, how will experts decide how much we should get? And when will it be ready?

Likely the FDA will approve the Moderna and J&J vaccine boosters later this month. FDA has a committee called the Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee (VRBPAC) that met last week. VRBAC presented their conclusions to the full FDA that will rule on whether to grant emergency-use authorization for the use of boosters. The next level review will be with the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). These are independent experts that are not FDA nor pharmaceutical employees. Assuming that the ACIP also recommends the boosters, then the final say—so will be from the CDC. A long-winded way of saying that the Moderna and J&J vaccine boosters will be ready at the end of this month in all likelihood. There is now data presented to FDA (although not yet peer-reviewed) that “mix or matched” boosters work well, so expect some word on that from the FDA, although the next most pressing thing on the FDA COVID-19 agenda is of course vaccination of 5- to 11-year-old children, the subject of an FDA meeting October 26th.

7. If we got our vaccinations months ago, how do

we go about getting proof of vaccination now that there are so many reports of counterfeit vaccination cards? I want to start traveling again, and I don’t know what counts as legal certification.

As I write this I am flying back from England with my colleague Dr. Allie Donlan, where we had meetings on UVA’s COVID-19 immunotherapy program that is supported by the Manning Family Foundation. What we discovered on this journey is that the proof of vaccination is a bit different depending on what country you are visiting. To visit the UK one scans and uploads the vaccine card at the airline website prior to departure, and it is not needed to be shown again (for example to visit a restaurant or public place). One does need to get PCR tested two days after arrival in the UK, and no more than three days prior to return to the US, but thankfully this is all spelled out beforehand when you do the check-in paperwork. It does make sense to take a cell phone picture of the front and back of the vaccine card so that even if you misplace it you can pull it up on your phone.

8. If we get past the delta variant, can we have confidence that maybe COVID will be a thing of the past? Or are we going to have to keep getting boosters?

The genie is out of the bottle so to speak, and COVID-19 will be with us for some time to come. Projections are that by next spring if children are vaccinated and no new variants emerge, that COVID-19 will

move from being pandemic to endemic, basically more like influenza. Additional good news is that since SARS-CoV-2 evolves much more slowly than, say, influenza, and because it does not cause latent infections like HIV, worldwide vaccination offers the promise of eventual eradication. I am seeing this right now at the WHO with polio, where I lead the Polio Research Committee. There has not been a child paralyzed with wild type polio since January! So we are on the cusp of global eradication of polio but this has taken three decades of concerted international effort.

9. Here’s what I would like to know that you did not provide further detail on last week: You state that we don’t know yet how high antibodies need to be to provide protection.... Is some scientific entity like the CDC currently even looking at this right now, running any kind of study between people who have acquired natural immunity and those who acquired immunity through vaccination?

Yes these studies are ongoing, but you are right to ask why we don’t already know the answer. In part we do, in that antibodies that neutralize the spike glycoprotein prevent infection, as evidenced by the fact that anti-spike monoclonal antibodies prevent and can even treat SARS-CoV-2 infection (work done in part right here at UVA). So it should be straightforward to measure these antibodies and determine if protective levels are present. However this is one of those “the devil is in the details” type things. The anti-spike IgG antibody tests detect both neutralizing and non-neutralizing antibody levels, so these tests do not directly measure the protection from infection conferred by the vaccine. In addition, each anti-spike antibody test that is on the market measures anti-spike antibody levels in a slightly different way and thus may not be directly comparable. Finally, vaccines protect not just with antibodies but via cell-mediated immunity which is much harder to measure. For most vaccines against infectious diseases, the FDA has determined antibody levels that are associated with vaccine-mediated protection, so this will happen. But I agree with you that it is frustrating today not to have a better handle on what level of anti-spike antibody correlates with protection.