

# WHAT SHOULD PARENTS KNOW ABOUT “WORK-TO-RULE”?



***Educators want to be back students for in-person learning as soon as it is safe to do so.*** Working-to-rule is not anyone’s preference, but thousands of educators across our system feel it is necessary to protect the health and safety of students and staff alike. This was not the decision of a few union leaders, it was the overwhelming decision of thousands of staff across the system, 91% of whom voted for this action. Staff are incredibly thankful to our Howard County families who have been patient and understanding of our workload throughout this pandemic, and we are asking you again for your support so that we can get back to the business we know best: educating children.

## **Q: What does “working-to-rule” mean?**

Working “to-the-rule” means performing our normal duties (“the rule” meaning those duties that are required) during the normal workday. It is meant to highlight the unpaid work educators do before and after school, on weekends, and during our lunch and planning periods.

## **Q: What can we expect as parents during this time?**

There will be many changes to learning as students enter hybrid learning, but we hope that the impact to families due to work-to-rule will be minimal. However, you may notice the following:

- ➔ Staff will not be available before or after their duty day to speak with parents. Families needing to speak with their teacher should make an appointment to speak with them during the duty day. It may also take longer for staff to respond to email.
- ➔ Some after-school activities like student clubs will be cancelled during work-to-rule. Activities for which teachers are paid (e.g. athletics) will continue as planned.
- ➔ Assignments may take somewhat longer to be graded and returned to students. This will become more noticeable during the change in marking periods. Teachers will try their best to grade assignments as soon as possible, but it may take up to three weeks to return an assignment, especially if it is lengthy or complex to grade.
- ➔ Makeup assignments are at the discretion of the teacher. Makeup assignments require extra work to modify and grade. During work-to-rule, your child’s teacher may not allow for a make up assignment, unless there is an extreme circumstance.
- ➔ Substitute coverage will be more difficult both because of the number of staff on leave and working virtually, and because of work-to-rule.

## **Q: Why are educators taking this action now?**

We believe that the right to a safe and healthy workplace is a fundamental worker right. The Board of Education's plan to return students to hybrid instruction is not only premature, it is a poorly-conceived and unsafe plan will do little if anything to improve student learning compared to virtual instruction. We have families of our own and are gravely concerned about our safety if we are left unvaccinated before returning to buildings. Many educators have already retired or resigned, and we fear losing more of our colleagues. We do not want to die for this plan.

## **Q: Why is HCPSS' plan unsafe?**

- HCPSS' reopening plan does not comply with [CDC Mitigation strategies to reduce transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in schools](#). Specifically, students will not be masked for the entire school day; students will not be grouped in cohorts to limit exposure; and there is no plan to provide testing or contact tracing.
- Children will be eating breakfast together, unmasked, in classrooms. This is an unsafe environment for staff, students, and their families.
- Many teachers, including those who teach related arts and those who are split between schools will be exposed to all children. This is not only unsafe, but it impairs effective contact tracing in the event of an outbreak.
- Our colleagues with high-risk medical conditions are being forced to return to buildings while their appeals for ADA and FMLA are still pending.
- Lack of adequate coverage for buildings will compel school administrators to combine classes, sprinkle students between classes, and other unsafe measures.
- Staff who contract COVID outside of school are being forced to utilize their own sick leave (if they have any) or take an unpaid leave of absence. This is bad public health policy, and it will encourage staff (especially those of whom are the lowest-paid) to work while potentially sick with COVID.

## **Q: What are the demands?**

- Ensure educators are immunized before physically returning to worksites, as other counties like Prince George's and Charles County have already done.
- When staff return to worksites, HCPSS must adhere to metrics to prevent COVID spread.
- Governor Hogan must release more vaccines, and the County must prioritize more vaccines for educators.
- The Board of Education must stand up to bullying behavior from the State Superintendent and Governor Hogan. Our lives must matter more than politics.

**Q: What can I do to support my child's teacher/paraprofessional/staff member during this time?**

- ➔ Schedule an appointment to speak with your teacher during the regular workday, instead of contacting them after hours.
- ➔ Be understanding when voluntary activities like clubs are cancelled. Recognize the value that teachers contribute when they volunteer that time for your child.
- ➔ Please be patient with your child's teacher regarding grading of assignments and responding to email.

**Q: What can I do as a parent to ensure educators are vaccinated?**

Write to the Board of Education ([boe@hcpss.org](mailto:boe@hcpss.org)) and Superintendent Martirano ([michael\\_martirano@hcpss.org](mailto:michael_martirano@hcpss.org)). Tell them you're a parent and why you support educators being immunized before returning to buildings.