September 4, 2020

Dear Secretary Salmon,

Last year, Maryland’s public schools received the [Health and Safety Best Practices Guidelines for Digital Devices](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Documents/ITSLM/Health_and_Safety_Best_Practice_Guidelines_Digital_Devices.pdf) that you signed and MSDE made mandatory reading for the state’s 25 school districts’ 57,000 full-time teachers.

The MSDE Best Practices document states:

• Consider age and developmental level of students and recognize the importance of time limits. *It is recommended that the use of digital devices with younger students be limited.*

• Limit time on devices – 10 to 20 minutes is recommended. Remind students to take eye and stretch breaks. (A [separate document](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Documents/ITSLM/2202020_Rule_Flyer.pdf) on this topic promotes the 20/20/20 rule regarding frequent eye breaks.)

Yet, this past Tuesday, MSDE called for at least 3.5 hours per day of live virtual instruction across all grade levels. Please consider the health threats mandated screen time poses to Maryland’s children.

The [American Academy of Pediatrics](https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/5/e20162592), which is cited in the above MSDE document, states four very serious conditions advanced by screen time.

1. **Obesity.** The odds of being overweight were almost 5 times greater for adolescents who watch more than 5 hours of TV per day compared with those who watch 0 to 2 hours.[**1**](https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/5/e20162592#ref-9) This study’s findings contributed to recommendations by the American Academy of Pediatrics that **children have 2 hours or less of sedentary screen time daily**.
2. **Sleep Disturbances**. Media use can negatively affect sleep.[**2**](https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/5/e20162592#ref-14)  Exposure to light (particularly blue light) and activity from screens before bed affects melatonin levels and can delay or disrupt sleep.[**3**](https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/5/e20162592#ref-17) Media use around or after bedtime can disrupt sleep and *negatively affect school performance*.[**4**](https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/5/e20162592#ref-13)
3. **Addiction.** Children who overuse online media are at risk of problematic Internet use,[**5**](https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/5/e20162592#ref-18) and heavy users of video games are at risk of Internet gaming disorder.[**6**](https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/5/e20162592#ref-19)
4. **Academic decline**. A growing body of evidence suggests that the use of media while engaged in academic tasks has negative consequences on learning.[**10**](https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/5/e20162592#ref-25),[**11**](https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/5/e20162592#ref-26)

Other districts around the country are creatively solving for remote learning with outdoor classrooms, independent study projects and other innovative enrichment opportunities. We hope that MSDE will explore alternate ways to learn (offline) as statewide mandates and thresholds are passed down to local districts like ours.

Lisa Cline,

Montgomery County Council of PTAs Safe Technology Committee, Chair