



November 10, 2020

The Honorable Muriel Bowser
Mayor
Executive Office of the Mayor
1350 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser,

At the State Board of Education's October 21 Public Meeting, we heard testimony from six invited guests with expertise relevant to successfully reopening schools and from 65 public witnesses—including parents, students, and teachers. For these public witnesses, this was their first chance since the announcement of the DC Public Schools (DCPS) reopening plan on October 5 to bring their views and facts to public officials. ***They raised a number of substantive concerns about both the process by which the reopening plan was developed and the details of the plan itself.*** Since then, DCPS parents through a petition, the Coalition for DC Public Schools and Communities (C4DC), the Senior High Alliance of Parents, Principals and Educators (SHAPPE), the Washington Teachers' Union (WTU), and the city's principals (via the Council of School Officers (CSO)), declared their lack of confidence in the plan and asked for a delay in order to revise the plan into something more workable.

We appreciate that DCPS has since announced such a delay. **We ask you to please use this time to work directly with school leaders and teachers on overall planning—and to determine more accurately how many families would like to return in person or to take advantage of CARE classrooms in order to develop a plan that stakeholders find more viable.**

Everyone is eager to find a way to bring back as many students as possible—and as soon as possible—prioritizing students most in need. We know that many students and their families are struggling with virtual learning and are losing ground academically. We know that for many students being back in the classroom is vital not just for academics, but for mental health and social reasons and that for many families, their very employment depends on students having a safe place to go during the day.

We also know that figuring out how to reopen schools in a pandemic is extremely complicated. It cannot be a one-size-fits-all plan. It must be based on the input, experience, knowledge, and needs of those closest to the situation: our parents and educators. **But the Term 2 proposal did not reflect stakeholders' input, with predictable results.** The failure to include educational professionals and families in the planning did not result in just vague feelings of non-involvement. It meant that the plan did not adequately address various health and safety issues, which have been





detailed elsewhere.^{1 2 3 4 5} Further, it would have seriously disrupted education for students across the city, including in these ways:

- Due to the reshuffling of class rosters under the plan, as many as 40 percent of elementary students were to be assigned to new teachers, thus wasting this fall’s efforts to build relationships between and among students and teachers, with all having to start once again.⁶
- Due to the requirements of the plan, the size of virtual classes for elementary students would have increased, to a cap of 40 students, minimizing teachers’ ability to provide tailored lessons to meet the needs of students.⁷
- CARE classrooms for elementary students—in which students were to receive supervision but not instruction—were to be supervised by adults with no experience or training working with young children (including some as young as 3 years old).
- Due to the DCPS plan’s reliance on secondary school staff to supervise the CARE classrooms, secondary schools would have lost as many as 10–25 staff members per school.⁸ Secondary schools would have had to close their newly developed Student Support Centers and abandon other initiatives developed this fall by schools trying to fill in the support gaps their students face during virtual learning.
- Disrupting the fledgling school-based reopening projects (e.g., Tyler Elementary, Horace Mann Elementary) initially solicited by DCPS and launched thanks to the efforts of staff and families to meet the needs of their school communities.

For the sake of our students, that process cannot be repeated. We urge you to begin now to develop a well-conceived plan for a Term 3 reopening—possibly with some students coming back even earlier. This time, the staff of each school, in consultation with the broader school community, must be given the space to design a reopening plan that works for its community. Parents must be engaged during the formation of a reopening plan, not just informed of a plan once it has been created.

We ask you, first of all, to frontload the overall planning process by putting in place a planning framework that would enable, empower, and jumpstart local school communities (likely via their Local School Advisory Teams) to identify the specific needs and priorities of their students and families—including which students are in greatest need of in-person learning—and how to address them effectively, making use of the school community’s unique resources. The framework should build on the successful, small-scale school reopening

¹ Coalition for DC Schools and Communities (2020, October 27). *C4DC Final Statement on DCPS Reopening*.
² Senior High Alliance of Parents, Principals and Educators (2020, October 30). *Re-Open Schools during COVID*.
³ Washington Teachers’ Union (2020, October 5). *Washington DC Teachers Union Releases Statement on Mayor Bowser’s Plan to Reopen Schools to In-person Learning*.
⁴ Washington Teachers’ Union (2020, October 15) *Washington Teachers’ Union Proposed School Inspection Checklist*
⁵ Council of School Officers (2020, October). *Open Letter to Mayor Bowser, Deputy Mayor Kihn and Chancellor Ferebee from the CSO Member Principals*.
⁶ Levy, Mary (2020, October 29). *Twitter*.
⁷ Stein, Perry (2020, October 22). *D.C. mayor points to learning loss in urging schools to reopen as city and union fail to reach agreement*. Washington Post
⁸ Stein, Perry (2020, October 28). *Principals critical of D.C. school system’s plan to reopen elementary schools*. Washington Post.





plans noted above. The planning framework should also establish minimum standards for consistency across schools, including the goal of bringing back as many students who prefer in-person classes as possible, while prioritizing those students most in need of in-person learning. Based on their needs and resources, schools—especially those with a higher number of students designated at-risk—may need additional funds to support such initiatives as outdoor education, tutoring, strengthened virtual learning, etc.

As part of the Term 3 reopening plan, we further urge you to:

- Reach an agreement on health and safety issues with employee unions and put in place, as is now beginning to happen, the PPE, HVAC, and other health and safety commitments that have been promised. Insofar as they are in place, families and staff will have much greater confidence in an in-person plan.
- Strengthen distance learning, so that those families who choose to continue to learn virtually will not have their students' education disrupted and, if due to health conditions all students have to return to distance learning, a strong virtual education will be in place.
- Find ever-stronger, more effective ways to meet the needs of students with disabilities and the requirements of their IEPs.
- Work with after-school programs, other youth-serving non-profits, and currently underutilized community institutions such as museums and parks that can host and/or staff the equivalent of CARE classrooms such that CARE students are adequately supervised by staff prepared to work with young children—and the staffing does not undermine the staffing and quality of other schools.

Attached is a summary of October 21 meeting and the archived video of our full meeting can be found on our [YouTube page \(DCSBOE\)](#), both are full of extremely impassioned, first-hand observations about key issues that deserve attention.

Signed,

Ruth Wattenberg, President and Ward 3 Representative
Markus Batchelor, Vice President and Ward 8 Representative
Emily Gasoi, Ward 1 Representative
Jack Jacobson, Ward 2 Representative
Frazier O'Leary, Ward 4 Representative
Zachary Parker, Ward 5 Representative
Jessica Sutter, Ward 6, Representative
Karen Williams, Ward 7 Representative
Alexander O'Sullivan, Student Representative
Shayla Dell, Student Representative

