

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS (DCPS)



Public Oversight Roundtable
on
“Return to In-person Instruction in DC Public Schools”

Testimony of
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District of Columbia Public Schools

Before the
Council of the District of Columbia
Committee of the Whole
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairperson
and
Committee on Education
The Honorable David Grosso, Councilmember

October 23, 2020
Live via Zoom Video Conference Broadcast



Chairman Mendelson, Chairman Grosso, members of the Committees, and staff. I am Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee, Chancellor of the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). Thank you for the opportunity to share DCPS' plans for Term 2. I look forward to continuing our conversation and will use my time today to provide an overview and highlight the steps we are taking to prioritize student and staff safety.

As a core part of this work, we are committed to clear lines of communication and authentic engagement with both our families and DCPS staff. I encourage the community to visit our website, [DCPSreopenstrong.com](https://dcpsreopenstrong.com), for more information on our reopening plans from learning models and student selection to health and safety preparations. Since our Term 2 announcement, we have hosted three public forums, which have been viewed by over 10,000 community members.

Since the onset of this pandemic that has affected too many families in our community, DCPS has remained grounded in the firm belief that to best serve students furthest from opportunity, such as students experiencing homelessness and those from families who are identified as at-risk, learning should take place in the classroom with clear safety precautions. This responsibility has been at the center of our many discussions with parents, staff, and students around safely reopening schools. We will continue to act in good faith with everyone, including the WTU, to ensure families are able to access high-quality instruction and the resources they need and deserve.

Term 2 Learning Models

Across the District, students, families, and educators adapted and enhanced new routines while adjusting to learning at home. At the same time, we know learning at home is not working for every student and family. The decision to take this significant step was made with safety and equitable access top of mind. Beginning in Term 2, DCPS will reopen school buildings with two different learning models for our Pre-K through 5th grade students. For both at-school options, we will prioritize classroom seats for our elementary students with the highest need based on current enrollment information, through a randomized selection process.

- First, with ***In-Person Learning Classrooms***, students will learn in small cohorts at their school for live, in-person instruction. The daily schedule will be similar to a typical school day.
- With our ***Canvas Academics and Real Engagement or CARE Classrooms***, students will have supervised care for the school day from a trained adult who is not their teacher. Students will have the benefit of being with their peers at school but will participate in lessons virtually on a computer. This program will begin in mid-November and we will add additional classrooms over several weeks.

A full learning at home model will still be available for all families that prefer to continue with this method of instruction. For middle and high school learners, to ensure continuity with semester schedules and grading practices, all 6th through 12th grade students will continue with the learning at home model through Term 2, with a planned transition to in-person learning at the start of Term 3. Additionally, select middle and high schools will continue to offer Student Support Centers and Career and Technical Education (CTE) programming.

It is our hope to allow students, especially those furthest from opportunity, to return to schools and receive the critical supports that prepare them for success in life. We plan to provide a safe and supportive learning space for our youngest learners—where we see more challenges with virtual learning—and to offer in-person instruction for students facing opportunity gaps with the goal of mitigating learning loss.

School Readiness



Our commitment to prioritizing safety, maximizing learning, and equity guides our planning as we prepare to enter our school buildings and facilities. Through Mayor Bower’s leadership, DC has invested over \$31 million in safety measures for schools, including \$3.6 million for additional PPE, \$4.5 million to building readiness initiatives, and \$24 million to HVAC enhancements. We have created operational guidance that meets all health and safety protocols; planned professional development that ensures workforce readiness; and created multiple ways for our school communities to build understanding of, and monitor compliance with, critical new operational routines.

We are utilizing a set of building readiness standards to ensure every facility is ready to welcome students back to a safe learning environment. These standards align with public health guidance issued by DC Health, OSSE, and the CDC to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 when schools may reopen. Schools have received detailed guidance to develop individualized operational plans prior to reopening. After these are implemented, school leadership, operational staff, and relevant central office teams will conduct building walk throughs, alongside parent and community leaders, to determine schools can safely reopen. Additionally, the monitoring of new routines and safety protocols will take place on a regular basis after students and staff return to in-person learning.

Regarding health screenings, DCPS is committed to putting in place robust health protocols for staff and students. All DCPS schools will have COVID-19 symptom screening procedures in place for staff and students. We ask that parents and guardians proactively identify when their student exhibits COVID-19 symptoms or has been exposed by using the Ask, Ask, Look protocol prior to arrival each day. In addition to our screening process, we are providing schools with rapid COVID-19 tests in the event that an individual presents with symptoms during the course of a school day. DCPS staff working in-person will be prioritized at all of DC Health’s public testing sites.

If a student, staff member, or community member who was in the building tests positive for COVID-19, schools will follow the health and safety guidance released by DC Health and OSSE. Through the [DCPS COVID-19 Response Protocol](#), every staff member will be trained to confidentially report potential exposure in a school building. The positive individual will immediately begin working or learning from home and consult their healthcare provider. We will provide self-quarantine instructions to close contacts, notify students and staff in the building about the positive case, and follow all steps outlined by DC Health for cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitizing the school building.

Conclusion

I appreciate the D.C. Council’s commitment to the health, safety, and well-being of our staff, students, and families. I also want to recognize our shared understanding of the benefits of in-person learning and hope for continued partnership around a strong reopening. Thank you for the opportunity to provide more information about reopening. I look forward to answering your questions at this time.



DC PUBLIC SCHOOLS TERM 2 UPDATES



#Reopen**Strong**



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
PUBLIC SCHOOLS



GOVERNMENT OF THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DC MURIEL BOWSER, MAYOR

Our schools have been without students, and our students without their teachers and friends for **7 months**.

We are grateful to our teachers and staff who have worked tirelessly to transform virtual classrooms into places of creativity, curiosity, and encouragement - and to our families who have supported their children at home.

And yet, we know learning at home is not working for every student and family.

We must adapt to the revealed needs of our students and families and provide a way for those who choose it and need it to come back to school.



Students Learn Best in the Classroom

Our youngest learners started the school year less prepared than previous years:

- **9 percentage point reduction** in students meeting or exceeding beginning of year literacy benchmarks
- **22 percentage point reduction** in Kindergarten students meeting or exceeding benchmarks

Our students with IEPs and English Learners are even further behind their peers on these measures.



Learning to read is a critical skill that will affect a child for the rest of his or her life: Students who cannot read on grade level by third grade are **four times less likely** to graduate by age 19 than children who do read proficiently by third grade, and the outcomes for children **growing up in poverty** are even more dire.



- ✓ Since the onset of this pandemic that has affected too many families in our community, DCPS has remained grounded in the firm belief that to best serve students furthest from opportunity, **learning should take place in the classroom with clear safety precautions**. This responsibility has been at the center of our many discussions with parents, staff, and students around safely reopening schools.
- ✓ **DCPS will implement all health and safety precautions** outlined by DC Health, as well as additional safeguards recommended by our union partners.
- ✓ We will continue to act in good faith with everyone, including the WTU, to **ensure students are able to access high-quality instruction** and the resources they need and deserve.

Preparing to Come Back to School

The health, safety, and well-being of the communities we serve is paramount. DCPS is implementing comprehensive safeguards to keep students and staff safe in our school buildings.

- ✓ Safety First Space Design
- ✓ Facility Readiness
- ✓ Health and Safety Routines
- ✓ COVID-19 Testing and Response Protocols

Investing over \$31 million in safety measures for schools, including \$3.6 million for additional PPE, \$4.5 million in building readiness, and \$24 million toward HVAC enhancements

Safety First Space Design

- **Socially Distant Space Arrangement:** Schools are set up to facilitate social distancing with floor decals, signage, tape, cones, etc.
- **Signage:** Schools have COVID-19 health signage (in English and other languages) posted in arrival spaces, hallways, and classrooms.
- **Plexiglass Table-Top Dividers** for reception and security areas where staff will have to interact with visitors and families in closer proximity than six feet.
- **Cleaning Supplies & Procedures:** Schools have the necessary cleaning supplies and will be able to replenish those supplies as needed. All cleaning supplies are from the EPA-registered list in the CDC guidance. School custodial staff have been trained to implement enhanced and deep cleaning protocols.
- **Health Isolation Room:** Schools have a designated health isolation room set up to facilitate social distancing for symptomatic students to wait for pick up.



Facility Readiness



HVAC Enhancements

- **\$24M** investment to increase the air change rates and filtration provided by HVAC systems to reduce any airborne concentrations of COVID-19 and related transmission risks in every school.
 - Schools with central HVAC: Installation of **MERV-13/MERV-14 filters**
 - Schools without central HVAC: Placement of High-Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filters
- **All classrooms across the DCPS portfolio will receive a portable medical grade HEPA filter**, proven to filter particulates down to 0.3 microns at a 99.99% efficiency.
- **3,000** mobile medical grade HEPA filters will be placed in elementary schools and PK-8 education campuses.
- The work is being done to American Society of Heating Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) standards and executed under the guidance and direction of a licensed professional engineer (PE) who is a standing member of ASHRAE's Epidemic Task Force on the Schools Team.

All elementary school HVAC systems will be updated by November 9.

Plumbing Systems: School plumbing work orders related to bathrooms, sinks, and water supply systems are prioritized so that schools are ready to welcome students and staff.

Health and Safety Routines

Daily Health Screening: Ask, Ask, Look Protocol and temperature checks for anyone entering the building

Personal protective equipment (PPE): Provided to anyone who enters the building - masks for students, masks and face shields for staff

PPE Ready for Distribution

1.5 M Disposable Masks
320,000 Child Size Masks (PK-2)
80,000 Communicator Masks for special populations
87,000 Face Shields (school based staff/1 per week)

Stocking schools with hand sanitizer and cleaning supplies

Reduced class sizes: To minimize the impact of a positive case on an entire school, students will be grouped in cohorts that do not have close contact with other cohorts.

Adjusted routines: Students will eat breakfast and lunch in their classroom. Classrooms will have scheduled, staggered arrival, recess, and dismissal times to limit interactions between classrooms.

Additional medical professionals in every school, every day to support new health and safety routines

Modified visitor policy: Non-essential visitors will not be allowed; essential visitors will be required to schedule a visit in advance.



DCPS will provide:

- ✓ On-site rapid testing for symptomatic individuals and follow-up PCR testing for anyone who receives a positive rapid test result
- ✓ DCPS staff working in-person will be prioritized at all public testing sites posted at coronavirus.dc.gov

Through the DCPS COVID-19 Response Protocol, every staff member will be trained to confidentially report potential exposure in a school building. When there is a confirmed, positive case of an individual in a school building, we will notify students and staff, provide self-quarantine instructions to close contacts, and follow all steps outlined by DC Health and the CDC for cleaning, disinfection, and sanitization.

Transparency and Accountability

- **Site-specific operational plans** for each school in accordance with health guidelines that will be posted online.
- **Written verification** of completed HVAC enhancements
- HVAC and all other operational metrics will be reviewed by a site-based walkthrough team using a detailed **Building Readiness Checklist** prior to school opening. Completed checklists will be posted online.
- On-going compliance monitoring throughout the school year
- Employee **concern** email mailbox and response protocol.



DCPS SCHOOL BUILDING READINESS CHECKLIST

SAMPLE
(NOT REAL DATA)

School **AITON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

Operations Plan <http://www.dcps.dc.gov/aiton-covidTEST>

Ward **77** Grades Served **PK3-5**

Address **533 48TH PLACE NE**

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Hygiene Supplies

- General PPE (masks and face shields) for students and staff
- Enhanced PPE (gloves, gowns, and shoe covers) for staff
- Hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes

Socially-Distant Space Arrangements

- Classrooms
- Hallways and staircases
- Staff spaces, including reception and security areas

Plumbing Systems

- Sink maintenance, specifically to ensure hot-water delivery
- Toilet maintenance

Water Access

- Fountain spouts turned off, to mitigate unsanitary water consumption
- Bottle fillers or water coolers

Cleaning Supplies and Procedures

- Return-to-school deep cleaning
- Daily enhanced cleaning procedures
- Cleaning supplies

HVAC Enhancements

- Yes MERV-13/MERV-14 filter compatible?
- MERV-13/MERV-14 filter ready
- Portable HEPA filter placed

Signage

- Arrival spaces and hallways
- Classrooms

Open/pending work orders that impact the safe opening and operations

6 Critical work orders

STATUS Complete In Progress

- Prepared to go beyond ensuring federally protected leave and federal and local accommodations to provide **additional flexibility** for employees requesting consideration for virtual staffing assignments due to personal circumstances
- Providing all teachers with **additional planning time** beyond Collective Bargaining Agreement requirements
- Allocating **additional professional development days** to Term 2, focused on health and safety protocols, trauma-responsive practices, and supporting students through learning transitions

Why In-Person Learning Is Critical

- For students receiving special education services, providers can offer supports that are difficult to do so virtually, such as physical or occupational therapy.
- For students who are not reading on grade level, the ability to have intensive language and literacy instruction is limited in a virtual environment, particularly for young learners.
- Educators are better able to accommodate the short attention spans of 3- to 5-years-olds in person.

Being at school also supports the emotional and physical wellbeing of our students. It ensures students receive a healthy meal each day. It allows them to build relationships with their peers, both in the classroom and outside on the playground.

Working with the Washington Teachers' Union

DCPS has been working closely and in good faith with the Washington Teachers' Union (WTU) over several months.

DCPS has engaged in more than 100 hours of discussions with the Washington Teachers' Union around reopening plans, including health and safety matters.

We remain at the table and continue our dialogue.



TERM 2 NEXT STEPS



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DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
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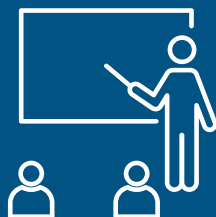


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Returning to In-Person Learning

In Term 2, DCPS will offer **two types of in-person programming** for some elementary students: **in-person learning** and **Canvas Academics and Real Engagement (CARE) classrooms**.

In-Person Learning



Families who are being offered an in-person learning seat will begin receiving notification by email, followed by a phone call from the school, on October 23.

CARE Classrooms



Families who are being offered a seat in a CARE classroom will begin receiving notification by email, followed by a phone call from the school, on October 30.

Since only a limited number of in-person learning classroom seats are available, students furthest from opportunity are being prioritized.

Accepting an In-Person or CARE Classroom Seat



From the point of contact, families have **two school days** to confirm their seat.

If a family does not respond within that time frame, they **will lose their offer** and their student will continue with all-virtual learning.



If the school **cannot make contact** with a family, the offer **will expire after 5 school days**.



If you are matched for an in-person learning seat, **you must accept your space as soon as possible**.

Accepting your space requires **calling your school and confirming** that you want the seat.



Important Dates

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
OCTOBER						
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31
NOVEMBER						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	1	2	3	4	5

October 23:

Notifications start going out to families about in-person learning seats

October 30:

Notifications start going out to families about CARE Classroom seats

November 9:

In-Person Learning classrooms open for grades PK-5

Week of November 16:

CARE classrooms begin for students in PK3 to 1st grade

Week of November 30:

CARE classrooms begin for students in 2nd through 5th grade

Learn more at
DCPSReopenStrong.com

