

**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
Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee, Ed.D.
Chancellor
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

December 2, 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 an update on DCPS' planning related to the current health emergency. I look forward to continuing our conversation around our response to the pandemic and our continued commitment to serve students and families with both strong virtual and in-person options.

DCPS has remained grounded in the firm belief that a safe and healthy in-person learning opportunity is the best way to teach and reach students who are facing significant barriers to success with virtual learning. It is our goal to provide opportunities for students to return to school and receive the critical supports they deserve. We know this is particularly important for our youngest learners as gaps in early literacy, social emotional development, and access to quality learning experiences have long term impacts on student success. At the same time, we have worked diligently to reimagine instruction during the pandemic and recognize that virtual learning will continue to be an important learning option for our families. We are grateful to our teachers, school leaders, and staff who have worked tirelessly to transform virtual classrooms into places of creativity, curiosity, and empowerment and to our families who have supported their children at home.

CARE Classrooms

To support students who are facing significant barriers with learning at home, DCPS is expanding in-person programming opportunities for students across the District. This includes phasing in CARE classrooms in elementary schools throughout Term 2. To date, over 600 families have accepted a seat in a CARE classroom. Currently, we are serving students at more than 30 schools, with additional CARE classrooms planned to open next week and in January. In this work, we have prioritized our youngest learners who have the most to gain from these classrooms and the social opportunities presented.

CARE Classrooms provide students the opportunity to engage in virtual learning under the supervision of a caring adult and socialize with their peers at school. This ability to connect, engage, and build positive relationships is critical for healthy development and learning. In our first phase, classroom facilitators are DCPS elementary school staff or employees of a trusted school partner. CARE staff received professional development based on their role and experience, including sessions on health, safety, and community building with students.

Virtual Learning

While providing in-person options, DCPS has also continued to take critical steps to create a virtual school environment where every student is given the opportunities and supports that they need to thrive while learning at home. This is a new experience for DCPS, our students, and our families, and, I am proud of the bold work our team has done to maximize learning in a very different setting.

DCPS spent the summer working with over 200 teachers to develop an innovative, user-friendly, and organized approach to virtual learning. While we know from early assessments that our students are not where they should be, DCPS has continued to iterate and improve our virtual learning opportunities, while also remaining committed to an in-person option. This includes increased dual language resources, science lab simulations, and additional tools for collaboration. For early literacy, which is an important benchmark for our youngest learners, we have built out a suite of digital tools, such as phonic manipulatives, adaptive learning programs, and video lessons.

We also introduced a cross-disciplinary Global Cornerstone called Living Through History. Through this unit and in partnership with the Smithsonian Learning Lab, 76 schools submitted time capsules that reflect students' lived experiences during the global pandemic. Over 400 of these virtual time capsules



are now available for the public on the [Smithsonian Learning Lab's website](#). As an extension, students in 3rd through 5th grade will have the opportunity to participate in virtual exchanges centered around discussions of identity, race, and cultural differences. As long as we remain in the current health emergency, DCPS will continue to offer high-quality virtual learning for families who choose that option.

School Readiness

I want to share my appreciation for those of you who were able to join our school building walkthroughs over the last few weeks. We have included a detailed list of our safety measures at the end of this testimony. DCPS will continue to ensure the safety of employees who report to work in-person through the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies, the implementation of enhanced health procedures at all school sites, and physical and operational workspace adjustments that support social distancing and allow employees to safely fulfill their roles. In addition to a full-time nurse at every school, we also have three Patient Care Technicians (PCTs) at schools to support school-based health protocols, such as temperature checks, symptom screenings, and staffing of the health isolation room.

We are providing schools with both rapid and PCR COVID-19 tests in the event that a student 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. In addition to symptomatic rapid testing already available at schools, Mayor Bowser announced today new asymptomatic COVID-19 testing protocols for students and staff participating in DC Public Schools (DCPS) in-person programming. This pilot project for schools with CARE and In-Person Learning Classrooms will include in-school testing for students and mailed testing kits for staff.

Looking to Term 3

DCPS' health and safety enhancements are an important step that must be coupled with community input. As we plan for in-person learning in Term 3, elementary school leaders are currently convening "Reopen Community Corps" to listen, learn from, and inform school-specific reopening plans for the remainder of this school year. We know that individual school communities are uniquely positioned to respond to the needs of their students.

This diverse group of 12-15 staff, educator, parent, and student voices will collaborate to provide recommendations around in-person learning plans for Term 3. Each school's Reopen Community Corps will meet four times between late November and January with the goal of reviewing instructional models for in-person learning and determining what grades will be served. Secondary school leaders will also launch an engagement process for Term 3 reopening.

As we look to expand in-person learning opportunities, I want to recognize the uncertainty that many of our families are experiencing about the coming months. DCPS is proud to serve a city that has prioritized an evidence-based response to this pandemic. Under Mayor Bowser's leadership, we will continue to follow the guidance from DC Health around all plans for in-person learning. DC Health continues to closely monitor and report on our public health metrics and goals, and we can adjust our plans. If needed, this includes dialing back or slowing down reopening schools.

Conclusion

As always, I appreciate the partnership with the D.C. Council to ensure our children have safe, rigorous, and joyful learning experiences throughout the virtual, hybrid, and eventual return to in-person learning. I also want to recognize our shared understanding of the benefits of in-person learning and hope for continued collaboration around a strong reopening.



Thank you for the opportunity to provide more information about our planning. I look forward to answering your questions at this time.



Appendix: DCPS Safety Measures

Safety First Space Design

- **Socially Distant Space Arrangement:** DCPS will ensure appropriate physical distancing by posting signage and floor demarcations, rearranging furniture, and providing student and staff training.
- **Plexiglass Table-Top Dividers:** Placed in reception and security areas, which are typically high traffic areas.
- **Health Isolation Room:** Schools have two designated health isolation rooms set up to facilitate social distancing for symptomatic students to wait for pick up.
- **Enhanced Cleaning:** Schools will undergo daily enhanced cleaning at the end of each day and deep cleaning based on a prescribed schedule per DC Health guidelines.
- **HVAC Enhancements:** DCPS made a \$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 our learning environments. The work is being carried out by numerous HVAC contractors under the guidance and direction of a licensed professional engineer and in accordance with recommendations provided by the American Society of Heating and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE). All schools are receiving portable medical-grade True HEPA filters in the learning areas and nearly 3,000 will be in place across elementary schools. Schools without a central HVAC system are receiving 15 additional HEPA filters to use in support spaces. True HEPA filters are proven to filter particulates down to 0.3 microns at a 99.99% efficiency. Additionally, schools with a central HVAC system received a MERV-13 filter as part of their enhancement.

Health and Safety Routines

- **Daily Health Screening:** DCPS will require a daily health screening for all students and staff entering DCPS buildings. Employees are required to complete this [self-assessment questionnaire](#) before their arrival daily. The health screening is aligned with guidance from DC Health and asks individuals if they are experiencing one or more of the common COVID-19 symptoms.
- **Daily Check-In to DCPS Facilities:** All DCPS employees are required to check-in to their worksite daily via the DCPS Staff Attendance Application in QuickBase. This daily check-in will facilitate efficient COVID-19 contact tracing activities in the event that a COVID-19 exposure occurs within a DCPS facility. Employees who are reporting to a worksite must log on daily; employees who do not have a device and are unable to log on to the application must be logged on by a POC identified by the school principal.
- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Cleaning Supplies:** All employees who report to work in-person will be provided with a daily face mask, a weekly face shield, and other PPE as required, at no cost to the employee. Additionally, staff will be provided with a supply of hand sanitizers and cleaning supplies to maintain their workspaces. Students, employees and visitors are required to use face masks/coverings while in DCPS buildings and will not be allowed entry into any facility without using required PPE.
- **Limit Group Sizes:** In accordance with DC Health guidelines, DCPS will place students in small group cohorts to minimize the impact of a positive case on an entire school; restrict non-essential visitors; prohibit large group activities; and cap occupancy in shared workspaces.

