

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



Public Oversight Roundtable
on
Reopening District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)

Testimony of
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Before the
Council of the District of Columbia
Committee of the Whole
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairperson

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Good afternoon Chairman Mendelson, members of the Committee of the Whole, and staff, I am Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee, Chancellor of the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). I appreciate the opportunity to share an update on DCPS' reopening work and our plan to expand in-person learning beginning on February 1, at the start of Term 3. Despite the challenges of COVID-19, I remain grateful for and inspired by the resilience that DCPS families, staff, and students have shown during this unprecedented health emergency. I also want to recognize the horrific events in our city over the prior weeks and highlight our continued need to fight for our ideals.

CARE Classrooms

Currently, 79 DCPS schools are offering in-person programming to approximately 1,000 students in over 140 CARE Classrooms, which provide students the opportunity to be back at school with their peers while continuing to learn virtually. Of the students who have accepted a seat in a Term 2 CARE classroom, approximately 90% meet one of our priority criteria, including 61% are designated as at-risk, 26% receive English Learner services, and 26% receive special education services. We are also proud to share the success of our initial in-person learning pilot at Brent ES, Ross ES, and Kimbell ES, which have operated for approximately two months.

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.

With this expansion of in-person programming, we have remained grounded in the guidance and science from DC Health and the Center for Disease Control. In addition to Mayor Bowser's \$31 million investment in school safety measures, we have established [a clear protocol for tracking and responding to incidents of COVID-19 in schools](#). Schools now have both rapid and PCR COVID-19 tests if any individual presents with symptoms during the course of a school day. In addition to symptomatic rapid testing already available at schools, DCPS has instituted asymptomatic COVID-19 testing protocols, allowing for tests every 10 days, for students and staff participating in DC Public Schools (DCPS) in-person programming.

When we identify possible exposure or a confirmed case, we move quickly to investigate and perform necessary safety mitigations, which can include the self-quarantine of close contacts and the possible temporary quarantine of a classroom cohort. As we look forward to welcoming back more students and staff, we continue to follow all guidance from DC Health and are supported by findings recently released by the American Academy of Pediatrics underscoring that schools do not significantly increase community transmission and highlighting the importance of reopening schools to support healthy child development and well-being. We will continue to post daily data around the results of these tests and any notifications that go out to our schools.

In my visits to CARE classrooms across the city, I have seen DCPS students who are excited and eager to be back in school with their peers. They have demonstrated an ability to quickly adapt to new routines and fully comply with our established health protocols.

Term 3 Reopening

In recent months, DCPS heard a call for more engagement and flexibility from our community, including the DC Council, when it comes to reopening plans. As we look to the start of Term 3, we are proud to



share the work of our school leaders and their Reopen Community Corps, which have prioritized engagement and planning that is responsive to their unique school context. School leaders collaborated with this diverse group of 12-15 staff, educator, parent, and student voices at their school. They reviewed feedback from [elementary](#) and [secondary](#) family learning preference surveys, led with equity to prioritize students with the highest needs, and helped school leaders design a tailored reopening plan for their school in Term 3.

We are also proud to have worked collaboratively with the Washington Teacher's Union to finalize an agreement that represents our shared commitment to ensuring students have the high-quality education and supports they need to thrive. We will continue to host biweekly meetings to hear from labor leaders and ensure that our planning is reflective of their insights, where possible.

Learning models will vary across schools based on the needs and feedback of each community but may include In-Person Learning (IPL) Classrooms with teachers, CARE Classrooms or tutoring services with staff facilitators, and self-contained classrooms for students with disabilities. Each school's reopening plan reflects family demand and, will be able to serve, on average, approximately 30 percent of their student population in person depending on staffing and classroom space. As of earlier this week, approximately 4,000 students have already accepted a seat offer for Term 3. We look forward to welcoming up to 15,000 students in-person in Term 3 while maintaining the virtual option for families that prefer it.

As shared earlier this month, DC Health anticipates beginning vaccine distribution for staff working in education facilities during the week of January 25. DCPS is working closely with DC Health on this effort and is proud to partner with Children's National to provide a dedicated vaccination site at Dunbar High School for DCPS and contracted staff who will be working in person.

Beyond Term 3

Despite the challenges of the public health emergency, DCPS remains committed to creating learning environments that eliminate opportunity gaps, interrupt institutional bias, and remove barriers to academic and social success. We know that our youngest scholars and students furthest from opportunity benefit the most from in-person learning and we commit to continue adapting our programming, aligned with guidance from DC Health and the changing needs of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the next several months and in the coming school year, we will work to accelerate student learning, while also ensuring that all DCPS students have a healthy and safe return to in-person learning. In this year like no other, DCPS has continued to pivot and maintain our commitment to the safety of students, families, and communities.

I value the partnership we have with the DC Council and remain committed to operating in good faith to build trust, increase transparency, and provide students with joyful learning experiences whether learning at home or in the classroom. I also want to share my appreciation for DCPS teachers, school leaders, and staff and highlight their work to provide quality programming options in Term 2, along with our valued agency partners and the commitment of our families. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and share our plans to reopen schools. I look forward to answering any questions at this time.

