



C4DC Final Statement on DCPS Reopening - October 27, 2020

Coalition for DC Public Schools and Communities ([C4DC](#)) is a coalition of all eight ward education councils as well as other organizations that share values and priorities essential to excellent and equitable District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS).

We cannot support the DCPS reopening plan for Term 2. We believe supports to students should be expanded but the re-opening at this level has to be postponed until Term 3 at the earliest and until there is sufficient time for meaningful community input and planning.

Treating all schools the same without regard to school size does not necessarily serve the most vulnerable elementary students in higher concentrations at some schools. It introduces instability to all students while reducing staffing to students learning virtually. This includes those vulnerable students who choose to continue learning from home. It will severely impact the ability of secondary schools to serve all of their students including those with the most challenges.

Our community conversations have made clear that parents, teachers, school-level staff, and community members have not been engaged in the development of this plan. We are not assured that this plan appropriately mitigates safety risks and enhances education equity. In addition, there will be two holiday breaks in term 2 increasing the likelihood of more COVID-19 cases for everyone.

Staying home remains the safest way to prevent contracting COVID-19. It is incumbent upon DCPS to pause the current timeline and work with families and teachers immediately on a plan that school communities are confident mitigate the risk of in-person learning. We share insight here on how a reopening plan must work based on input we have received from stakeholders across the city.

Document and publicize, by school, the readiness to meet and support the agreed-upon health and safety protocols, per the following:

- Meet [guidelines](#) outlined by Washington Teachers Union (WTU).
- Publicize documentation of evidence that safety measures are in place and will remain in place for the duration of in-person.
- Publicize metrics on the level of community incidence that will necessitate closing schools.
- Resolve these [questions](#) put forward to the Council by the DC Auditor on safely reopening schools.

When the safety and health protocols are trusted to reduce the health risks, then the return to school program plan must address the pandemic's educational challenges in ways that expand equity in learning outcomes beyond what is currently happening with all-virtual learning.

Maintain the current classes and teaching assignments at all grade levels as a baseline. This would support the following:

- Respect and protect the relationships, routines and trust that teachers have taken great effort and care to gradually rebuild with their students since the onset of the pandemic. This provides stability and connection that is critical for students' academic and socio-emotional development, especially given the social turbulence of the current times
- Maintain class size stability and avoid increases of up to 40 students per class. Large class sizes will create additional challenges for all elementary students and especially for English Language Learners, for those receiving SPED services and for students who are At Risk who are continuing virtual learning.
- Families, teachers, community-based and faith-based organizations should be consulted on what is needed to better support students who do not opt-in for in-person learning. Solutions could include providing desks and chairs, grocery delivery, a stipend for childcare or at-home instructional support.
- Maintain established school programs like dual language, arts integration and Montessori, working closely with school communities to support and augment the solutions that educators have already identified for adapting programming for distance learning.
- Expand the opportunities for outdoor learning and play as indicated [here](#).

Rescind the order to remove hundreds of secondary staff that are to be reassigned to elementary schools.

Following the directions from DCPS central office, hundreds of staff from the secondary schools are to be reassigned to the elementary schools to staff CARE classrooms. This order assumes that the secondary schools are overstaffed during the pandemic and that assistant principals, deans, coaches, counselors, etc. are not crucial in middle and high schools when operating virtually. This will severely impact the operation of these schools and the support that they are now extending to the 11 to 18 year old students in our system including those that are unhoused, English Language Learners and those receiving SPED services or are otherwise At-Risk. This is not a voluntary assignment for the secondary staff and it is not related to their experience or comfort with 3 to 10 year old children. This is fundamentally inequitable to everyone.

- Secondary staff members identified for reassignment make up the infrastructure that allows the teachers to do their jobs effectively. They also have relationships with the students and are available to troubleshoot and intervene to provide critical supplemental support to the student-teacher relationship.
- Secondary staff members are mentors and tutors, mental health providers and providers of tech. support to students and staff at their schools. They process enrollment applications, answer the phones and keep the school operating. These roles continue to be important and meaningfully distinct from the role of classroom teachers and should thus be treated as such. They are never dispensable, and their loss would be felt even more acutely now.
- With a full staff, Student Support Centers could be expanded in Term 2 if they are working for secondary students. More proposals could be submitted so that we don't lose these students, including the vulnerable middle schoolers, the new-to-high school 9th graders or the 12th graders anxious about their post-graduation futures.
- Opportunities for secondary students to safely have contact with their peers can be initiated if schools are fully staffed.

- Continue to plan and support a possible return to school for secondary students. This will be impossible without a full staff. These elementary reassignments could be indefinite in order to provide stability to the elementary programs.

We believe that by engaging families and school staff that DCPS has the opportunity to develop a reopening plan that is equitable and safe. DCPS needs to tap into the enormous good will and energy that our schools and communities have to serve the young people in our city. Without engaging local schools, families and communities directly, the trust essential for reopening in a pandemic will not be forthcoming.

This trust has to be there before we can move forward. We are grateful for the inquiries of Councilmembers and State Board of Education elected officials, the Office of the DC Auditor, for [whistle blower protections](#), and to the WTU and other unions for their work on articulating what it takes to return to school safely.

See C4DC Signatories on Next Page:



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Signatories:

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Ward 3 – Wilson Feeder Education Network

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Ward 4 Education Alliance

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Ward 5 Education Equity Committee

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Ward 6 Public Schools Parent Organization (W6PSPO)

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Ward 7 Education Council

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Ward 8 Education Council

Contact: Michael Grier; Email: ward8educationcouncil@gmail.com

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21st Century School Fund Building public will and capacity for educationally appropriate school facilities that meet community needs.

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DC Fiscal Policy Institute: Promotes budget choices to reduce economic and racial inequality and build widespread prosperity in DC, through research and policy solutions.

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EmpowerEd: Elevating the voices of diverse DC teacher leaders and strengthening shared leadership in DC schools

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In the Public Interest: Advocating for accountability, transparency, and democratic control of public schools

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Senior High Alliance of Parents, Principals and Educators (SHAPPE): A common voice promoting excellence in DCPS high schools

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Teaching for Change: Building Social Justice Starting in the Classroom

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