



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
JOHN A. WILSON BUILDING
1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, NW
WASHINGTON, DC 20004

JANESE LEWIS GEORGE
Councilmember, Ward 4

COMMITTEE MEMBER
Human Services
Labor and Workforce Development
Recreation, Libraries and Youth Affairs
Transportation and the Environment
Special Committee, COVID-19 Recovery

December 30, 2021

Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee
Chancellor
District of Columbia Public Schools
1200 First Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002

Dear Chancellor Ferebee:

I write seeking further information on DCPS' COVID-19 mitigation strategies and plans for return to school next week. I appreciate the Mayor's decision to shift to a mandatory test to return strategy for students and staff. I also appreciate that DCPS is making KN95 masks available to all staff. I believe both strategies, coupled with broader public health strategies in schools and throughout the city, will help keep our community safe and our children learning in person.

I do, however, have some concerns related to DCPS' COVID-19 mitigation efforts to date. In October, the Mayor announced an additional \$22 million would go to DCPS to allow each school to hire a COVID Strategy & Logistics Coordinator, a full-time substitute teacher, and to hire 10 more in-house contact tracers for DCPS.¹ When I asked for an update on these investments earlier this month, I was greatly disappointed to learn that, as of last week, *no schools have fully onboarded either of these new positions* and the new contact tracers are still in supervised on-the-job training. Additionally, the Mayor's announcement said that a pool of Central Office employees would be deployed to work in schools as substitute teachers. As of last week, only 22 Central Office staff (of 700+ total employees²) have completed their clearances and *DCPS is unable to identify whether any Central Office employees have worked in schools yet* because there is no formal tracking system.

I'm concerned that these delays indicate a lack of urgency on the part of the administration to protect our students and staff amidst the pandemic. Earlier this month the Council held a roundtable on teacher and principal turnover in the District. We heard testimony from dozens of public witnesses sharing stories about how many school staff are hanging on by a thread and that this year may be their toughest one yet. Our students and teachers rely on your leadership to help them focus on their academic and socio-emotional recovery. I appreciate that this has been a difficult time for everyone, but we must do everything in our power to get our students back on track and retain our dedicated teachers – following through on the commitments we have made is a necessary foundation for achieving these goals.

¹ Mayor's Press Release, October 14, 2021: <https://mayor.dc.gov/release/mayor-bowser-announces-additional-22-million-support-dcps-covid-19-mitigation>

² DCPS FY20 Schedule A as of January 31, 2021: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/gjb4u3u7hnofdts/AAB_qNtisb-0ESaPm_D9WkO5a/DCPS%20Performance%20Oversight%20Responses?dl=0&subfolder_nav_tracking=1

That said, I have a few follow-up requests related to my earlier information request:

- Please provide an estimated date by which each school will have a fully onboarded COVID Strategy & Logistics Coordinator and full-time in-house substitute teacher.
- Elaborate on Central Office's efforts to support in-person learning during the pandemic.
- Clarify DCPS' case notification protocols and explain efforts to expedite the process by which families and staff members learn about all positive COVID-19 cases in their buildings.
- Please provide metrics to demonstrate DCPS' layered mitigation strategies are working.
- Share data sets from DCPS contact tracers explaining the extent to which school buildings have been a source of transmission in this latest surge of cases.

I also have a few additional requests in response to yesterday's Situational Update and DCPS' plans for a return to in-person learning next week:

- Provide a specific metric (i.e., % of students or staff unavailable or level of community spread) by which DCPS decides whether to shift a classroom, grade level, or whole school to virtual learning.
- Please share any plans for DCPS to distribute KN95 masks to students as well as staff.
- Will the dcps.dc.gov/safereturn website allow parents to report if one or more siblings of a student tests positive? If not, please explain if DCPS will have a process for families to identify a student as a close contact ahead of next week's return date.
- How is DCPS coordinating contact tracing with charter and private schools, and with childcare settings, where one sibling may be enrolled in a DCPS school where another sibling is enrolled in learning settings outside of DCPS' purview?
- Does DCPS plan to test a greater percentage of students or staff in the coming weeks? What barriers are preventing DCPS from implementing a "Test to Stay" strategy for in-person learning?
- Provide an update on student vaccination rates by school. If DCPS is not currently tracking these figures on a school level basis, please explain that as well, particularly given the recently approved Coronavirus immunization requirement for students.³
- Clarify DCPS' current COVID-19 paid and unpaid leave policy. Why does DCPS not provide paid leave for staff members taking care of loved ones in quarantine?

Sincerely,



Janeese Lewis George
Ward 4 Councilmember

³ B24-423, "Coronavirus Immunization of School Students and Early Childhood Workers Amendment Act of 2021", transmitted to the Mayor on December 29, 2021: <https://lims.dccouncil.us/Legislation/B24-0423>