

To: Members of the Re-Open DC Education and Childcare subcommittee:

From: Committee Member Cathy Reilly

Schools are vital core institutions for our city's residents. In re-opening them we will need to ensure that they can attend to the educational and emotional needs of our young people as we create a learning environment that protects their health and safety in this time. This will require creative solutions to their need to be social and the need for exercise. It will have to take into account our most vulnerable populations including children with special needs, English Language learners and immigrants, students at greater risk and our incarcerated students. It will need to attend to the stress and trauma for many with appropriate supports as well as acknowledge the learning loss. We will need to also address how we are connecting with students and families through the summer.

Adults and students that are at higher risk must be protected and supported. This will entail flexibility in attendance and sick leave and the need for more robust and equitable continued distance learning opportunities at every level.

Schools remain the main distribution point for meals and other basic services for many families in our city. Their role as a community resource will need to be maintained and supported.

The Senior High Alliance of Parents, Principals and Educators, a member of [C4DC](#), convened a meeting to address the issues of re-opening schools. There were 37 participants from across all wards of the city including parents, principals, teachers and community members. This is a summary of the priorities we discussed that we would like the committee to include in their planning.

- **Collaborative planning** that begins now at every level and is inclusive of all the stakeholders. The health and safety measures recommended by John Hopkins include social distancing which reduces the number of students on a site and restricts their movement. While there is capacity at some sites, there is current crowding at others for example SWW, Wilson and Roosevelt. If we need to be at COVID-19 capacity of about 60% there will need to be adjustments in master schedules, consideration of staggered schedules, as well as possible use of additional spaces. All of this will require joint planning and coordination by the principals, teachers, staff, parents and community. Information must flow up. Re-opening will need to occur with the cooperation and active participation of staff, parents and communities at the school level. Here is an outline from one school community that is an example of the thinking happening around the city.

Mary Filardo of the 21st Century School Fund in her work as the Coordinator, National Council on School Facilities; [www.facilitiescouncil.org](http://www.facilitiescouncil.org) has been working with districts across the nation on a worksheet for opening buildings. [This excerpt](#) gives an example of the level of detail that will be needed.

- **Clear and Consistent Messaging and Communication** on the risks of infection, on the recommended practice for reducing the risk and on the measures that will be put in place. It will be crucial for personnel to have the agreement, support and consent of the staff and students at every school as measures are mandated that could restrict movement and limit desired interactions. They will

also need to feel they are adequately protected. It could be an effective social media and publicity campaign.

- **Attention to Transportation:** Students in DC travel all over the city to attend school. This is particularly true at the high school level. This committee will need to have in place policy and practice on the metro and buses that can reduce the risk of spreading infection if students are to return to school.
- **Uniform Guidance:** from the city for all school sectors on the measures to protect health and privacy that will be uniformly implemented and enforced. This includes but is not limited to how quarantining will take place, when and how closures will take place if there are people testing positive. It includes the preventive measures taken at entry, temperatures, oxygen levels, diagnostic testing, contact tracing. It also includes the standards of cleaning which will be expanded. What documentation is needed to re-open a school or class? Transparent communication when a closure is needed. Most importantly it should include a trusted and constructive avenue to report problems so they can be addressed.

Clear and Consistent Guidance from each Local Education Agency: this should include flexibility at the local school level in areas where individual discretion will be important. It will need to address at a minimum attendance, discipline, resources and support.

- **Adequate Personnel:** Even in this time of budget challenges schools will need additional personnel to implement the level of plans being considered for a re-opening. At a minimum this includes a full time school nurse at every site, an expanded pool of qualified substitute teachers and more custodians or personnel to adequately clean and disinfect the surfaces within each building.
- **Facilitation of Resources and Support from the City and Partners:** We can learn a lot from the childcare centers that have been open since March. Our partners across the spectrum from HS Health Centers, Globalize DC, the Universities should be included as we envision a more equitable and creative approach to schooling. We could also enlist the support of artists to support our students in expressing their emotions and thoughts. Our schools will need the coordinated support of other city agencies and they will absolutely need a budget that covers the considerable extra costs of reducing the risk of spreading infection in this challenging time.

**Additional Resources:** survey from [Ward 3](#) and one from [Ward 6](#) and a [letter](#) on the technology needs submitted this spring.

### **Quotes to Ground Us in our work:**

*"I am concerned about students who are very social, with 6 feet of distance and each student brings germs from transportation to school, and if we do rotational basis, will really need to clean building all the time, will we invest in temps, masks, and cleaning, when I go out with a mask, I hate wearing a mask. I can't imagine teaching with a mask."*

*"They touch each other, no matter what I say, I teach 9<sup>th</sup> grade and kids new to the district; hard for kids transitioning schools; 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>; 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup>; or new city; to get minimal level of compliance to social distance guidelines, new kids will need a lot more support than students already with relationships in the school."*