

Dear Councilmember Lewis George,

Thank you for your letter regarding the clearance process for DC Public Schools (DCPS) staff and volunteers. The safety of our students is always our foremost priority. Please see our responses to your specific questions below.

Explain the cause of delays in screening applicants this year, including challenges regarding contracting, vendors, budgets, DCPS staffing, and other contributing factors.

The [School Safety Omnibus Amendment Act of 2018 \(SSOAA\)](#), which was enacted by Council in 2019, required Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to take additional steps to prevent and address student sexual abuse by school staff and student-on-student acts of sexual harassment, sexual assault, and dating violence.

A significant component of the Act is increased “due diligence” regarding staff, contractors, and volunteers. This includes a comprehensive review of whether the individual has been the subject of any child abuse or sexual misconduct investigation by any employer, state licensing agency, law enforcement agency, the DC Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA), or another state's equivalent, unless the investigation resulted in a finding that the allegations were false, or the alleged incident of child abuse or sexual misconduct was not substantiated. Prior background clearance procedures were limited to a background check (fingerprinting) and Mandatory Drug and Alcohol Testing (MDAT) screening.

To ensure compliance with the Act, DCPS has partnered closely with the District of Columbia Department of Human Resources (DCHR) and CFSA to stand up a process for individuals serving DCPS to complete this additional Child Protection Register (CPR) check conducted by CFSA: [Child Protection Register \(CPR\) | cfsa \(dc.gov\)](#).

We have appreciated the ongoing collaboration of our agency partners as we have made this shift. However, we are seeing the full impact of these new requirements for the first time this school year. Specifically, the pandemic affected school operations in that before and after care services and other school partnerships were not in full effect for School Year 2020-2021, and our return to normal operations has increased the demand of these compliance checks.

The CPR check is a time and labor-intensive element of the clearance process. Here are some of the factors that delay results:

- The CPR check is a civil investigative process and not a criminal check. There is no national database to search, and no associated fingerprints. Each applicant is manually researched by CFSA to ensure that the name, date of birth, social security number, and other indicators are matched to prevent erroneous results.
- When CFSA finds that an application is incomplete, incorrect, or illegible, the 14-day turnaround time for results cannot begin until a complete and correct application is received.

- Our partners at CFSA share that they currently do not have the resource capacity to process the volume of applications being received within the standard timeframes.
- The CPR check was a paper process until April 2020, when CFSA transitioned to an electronic process due to its modified operating status during the Public Health Emergency. According to CFSA, the technology infrastructure used to run CPR checks is very rudimentary. For example, there is no automated way to provide a status update to applicants or employers. Each query requires staff to pause the processing of applications to check on the status of the application in question and provide that update to the querier.

Mayor Bowser recently dedicated an additional \$22M to support DCPS’ COVID-19 response. DCPS is directing a portion of these funds to CFSA to expand capacity related to this work. In addition, DCPS will be transitioning to a new vendor beginning November 1, 2021 that will accept CPR applications directly from clearance candidates, vet for completion, share with CFSA for processing, and then route results back to DCPS expeditiously.

While we fully concur that safety is paramount, we note that the heightened screening procedures mandated in the Act do have an impact.

A list of DCPS schools awaiting staff clearance and how instruction or coverage is being covered for any impacted classes or programs.

DCPS continues to process candidates to fill vacancies as they occur. In the instance that class coverage is needed, schools submit a request for substitute staff via our online platform. If a substitute teacher from the substitute staff platform is not available, schools leverage staff within the school building who can provide classroom coverage.

The following schools have current candidates in the clearance process:

Schools	# of staff awaiting CPR clearance (as of 10/18/21)
Capitol Hill Montessori @ Logan	1
Aiton ES	1
Anacostia HS	1
Bard HS Early College DC	2
Barnard ES	1
Beers ES	1
Benjamin Banneker HS	1
Brightwood ES	1
Bunker Hill ES	1
Burroughs ES	1
Burrsville ES	3
Cardozo EC	1
Columbia Heights EC	3
Coolidge HS	2

DCPS Virtual Academy	4
Deal	1
Dorothy I. Height ES	2
Dunbar HS	1
Eastern HS	2
Excel Academy	3
H.D. Woodson HS	1
Hart MS	3
Hearst ES	1
Hendley ES	2
Houston ES	2
Hyde Addison	1
Ida B. Wells MS	1
J.O. Wilson ES	2
Janney ES	1
Johnson MS	4
Ketcham ES	1
King ES	2
Lafayette ES	3
Langdon ES	2
Langley ES	2
LaSalle-Backus ES	2
Lawrence E. Boone ES	4
Ludlow-Taylor ES	2
MacFarland MS	3
Mann ES	1
Maury ES	1
McKinley Technology HS	2
Miner ES	1
Moten ES	2
Murch ES	2
Noyes ES	2
Oyster-Adams Bilingual School	1
Payne ES	2
Peabody ES	2
Phelps Architecture, Construction, and Engineering HS	1
Powell ES	1
Randle Highlands	1
River Terrace EC	3
Roosevelt HS	3
Roosevelt STAY HS	2
Savoy ES	1

School Without Walls @ Francis-Stevens	2
School Without Walls HS	1
Seaton ES	1
Shepherd ES	1
Simon ES	2
Sousa MS	3
Stanton ES	1
Takoma ES	1
Truesdell	1
Tubman ES	2
Tyler ES	3
Van Ness ES	3
Walker-Jones EC	5
West ES	4
Whittier ES	3

Identify steps taken to mitigate the effects of delays, including real-time status updates for applicants and support from DCPS staff for OST providers short on approved staff.

DCPS and CFSA are working to mitigate the backlog and help CFSA complete CPR checks within the 14-day processing window with the following strategies:

- CFSA has detailed three employees to support the CPR unit, and with the Mayor’s recent investment, the agency will add three FTEs to increase staffing capacity to process DCPS’ applicants.
- CFSA has modified the application form and tip sheet to educate applicants and minimize the likelihood of incomplete and incorrect submissions.
- CFSA will procure a call center solution to automate status queries and requests for assistance.
- CFSA will produce tutorials and explainer videos to support applicants and employers with the application process.
- DCPS will be working with a new vendor beginning November 1st that will accept CPR applications from clearance candidates, vet for completion, send to CFSA for processing, then route results back to DCPS expeditiously.
- DCPS is transitioning to a new drug testing vendor beginning November 1st to further enhance capacity for drug testing.

Describe efforts to streamline and improve the screening process in the future.

Please see above responses detailing our efforts to implement this heightened requirement imposed by the School Safety Omnibus Amendment Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lewis D. Ferebee". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "L" and a long, sweeping underline.

Lewis D. Ferebee, Ed.D.
Chancellor, DC Public Schools