

January 5, 2022

Dear Councilmember Lewis George,

Thank you for your letter. Please find responses to each of your questions below.

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.

DCPS is working diligently to onboard COVID-19 Facilitators/Coordinators. At this time, we estimate that facilitators will be in the buildings within the next couple of weeks. Because background checks and clearances take some time, we cannot guarantee a specific date where every candidate will be in the physical building but we aim to be fully staffed by the end of the month. DCPS is also working on substitute placements for schools with the greatest needs. We anticipate having the first round of substitutes placed before the end of the month and we are working expeditiously to place substitutes on a rolling basis over the next few weeks.

Elaborate on Central Office's efforts to support in-person learning during the pandemic.

Returning to in-person learning while our country continues to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic is difficult and presents new challenges. DCPS Central Office has been focused on supporting the health, safety, and well-being of our students, staff, and families.

- DCPS has hosted over 30 vaccination clinics in all eight wards for students and families.
- All staff are required to show proof of COVID-19 vaccination.
- Since the start of the school year, DCPS has hosted four parent townhalls on the following topics: response protocols, testing, creating safe environments, and test-to-return.
- Students are automatically enrolled in our asymptomatic testing program, which supports asymptomatic testing, symptomatic testing, and testing for close contacts.
- DCPS has budgeted for all schools to receive additional COVID-19 support personnel.
- To support a safe reopening of our schools, all students and staff will be required to provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test before returning to school after the holiday break on Thursday, January 6.

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.

As [shared with families on December 22](#), to expedite notifications of positive reported cases at schools, close contact notifications will be sent to all students and staff in the classroom of a positive reported case if more detailed contact tracing cannot be completed expeditiously. Community notifications will now be modified to note the total number of new cases reported within a school building.

Please provide metrics to demonstrate DCPS' layered mitigation strategies are working.

DC Health tracks outbreaks, defined as two or more cases of COVID-19 reported at a location which have a plausible epidemiological link. These data allow DC Health to help public health authorities understand where transmission of COVID-19 may have occurred. According to the DC Health COVID website, since August 29, 2021, there have only been a total of 69 outbreaks in DCPS. This is a strong

indication that our mitigation strategies are working. Asymptomatic testing is another important data point informing the efficacy of our mitigation strategies. DCPS schools participate in OSSE's school-based asymptomatic testing program, with a goal of testing 20% of enrolled students weekly, per Council's requirement. From September 1 to November 29, DCPS asymptomatic testing positivity rate was consistently below 1.0%, well below the rate of infections in the community. In the month of December, as COVID numbers increased across the city, we saw similar increases in the asymptomatic testing data. Increased positivity rates during asymptomatic testing were a key factor in school closure decisions.

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.

This question is most appropriate for DC Health as that is the agency that looks at each case in-depth to include an individual's activity in and outside of the school building. This information is key in deciphering if any case is the result of community or school spread.

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.

We expect that some schools and classrooms will need to transition to situational virtual learning throughout the semester, especially in the coming weeks. Our goal is to be flexible, responsive, and guided by our students' needs. As we shared at the Mayor's December 20 COVID-19 Situational Update, DCPS has a situational virtual policy. We evaluate each school based on the guidance of DC Health, reviewing the impact to educational continuity by looking at the number of students currently instructed to quarantine, and evaluating whether the school can conduct normal operations based on staffing and scheduling considerations.

Please share any plans for DCPS to distribute KN95 masks to students as well as staff.

DCPS works with the Office of Contract and Procurement (OCP) and the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) for all PPE procurements on behalf of the agency. DCPS has received approximately 129,000 KN95 masks to supply to teachers and staff in preparation for the return to school. DCPS completed the distribution of these masks to all schools on Thursday, December 30, 2021. These masks are designed for use by adults and not children. DCPS encourages students to continue to bring and utilize their own masks during school. DCPS is prepared to continue distributing non-surgical face masks to all students who need them throughout the school day.

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.

Separate entries are required for each enrolled DCPS student in a household. Families will see a button to share results for additional students after their first entry is completed. In alignment with DCPS current practice, parents should notify their school (by phone or email) if their child is a close contact of someone who tests positive (sibling or otherwise) and follow DCPS current quarantining guidance for close contacts.

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?

DC Health manages COVID response for any case where families may have children across LEAs outside of DCPS. Our COVID response team encourages families to share COVID-19 information with all educational settings that impact that particular family. While health and safety is our priority, we also have a responsibility to protect families' private health information. At this time, we share as much information we know about individuals with DC Health.

Does DCPS plan to test a greater percentage of students or staff in the coming weeks?

DCPS will maintain our commitment to test a sample of asymptomatic students each week to screen for COVID-19 while continuing to lean on all mitigation strategies that have been critical in offering a safe place for students to learn. We will also continue to test symptomatic students daily.

What barriers are preventing DCPS from implementing a "Test to Stay" strategy for in-person learning?

On December 17, 2021, the CDC endorsed a test-to-stay approach as another valuable tool in a layered prevention strategy for schools. It is important to note that test to stay is supported by CDC specifically for asymptomatic students who are not fully vaccinated and are close contacts. OSSE is evaluating operational options for implementing such a program. In the meantime, we believe it is important that schools use their delivery of rapid tests to distribute to their school communities. We will also continue our asymptomatic and symptomatic testing programs when school resumes this week.

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.

DCPS overall required school immunization compliance is at 77.5%; this is not inclusive of COVID-19 vaccinations. DC Health will provide immunization data to all LEAs through District of Columbia Immunization Information System (DOCIIS) early this year.

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?

DCPS' leave policies align with those of DC government. Staff who must take leave in order to care for a child or dependent as a result of the closure of a school or a care setting, or to care for a child or dependent who must quarantine, have the leave options available below:

- WTU employees must use sick/general leave for the caregiving activities outlined above. When exhausted, the employee must use leave without pay.
- Non-WTU employees must use annual leave for the caregiving activities outlined above. When exhausted, the employee must use leave without pay.

Sincerely,



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