

DC Families for COVID Safer Schools

Working to Protect all Families

Recommendations to the DC City Council for Emergency Legislation (October 1, 2021)

This is an emergency. Delta is surging, kids can catch and spread Delta easily, it can make them very sick, and the long-term effect on children who catch Covid-19 is unknown but research suggests it's very concerning. The city has a responsibility to protect children, and must do all it can to protect them from Covid-19.

The plan developed by DCPS that is currently in place is reckless, as evidenced by the number of outbreaks that have already occurred in schools.

Each of the items below would help protect students from Covid-19 and make DC schools safer while Covid-19 is present in our community. We are aware emergency legislation cannot bear costs, and none of the items noted below need to incur any.

DISENROLLMENT

- Keep DCPS and charter LEAs from force disenrolling families who are keeping their student home solely due to Covid-19 concerns (or allow families to re-enroll in their same school if they were already disenrolled)
- Stop schools from referring families who are doing this to CFSA; including closing open cases, and expunging cases from records

TESTING

- Direct the Mayor to accept all federal funds and programs available to DC to help make schools safer, and;
- Direct that these funds be prioritized to conduct asymptomatic testing until 100% weekly testing of all staff and students is achieved across DC.
- Require preschool students and others unable to handle the saliva-based test to be administered a nasal swab test instead.
- In lieu of a different concrete plan to achieve 100% weekly testing, instruct DCPS to partner with Affinity (a federally-funded testing program) to cover the gap of any students NOT tested by DCPS each week through other partners and programs. (Testers are the only component of Affinity that costs money, but Affinity provides training for free and parent volunteers administer these tests across the nation. Volunteers can be recruited and trained by PTAs to conduct the testing if DC does not want to pay for testers).
- Ensure Covid-19 testing at schools is conducted in as safe a way as possible, ideally outdoors, and providing appropriate distance between unmasked people and keeping people unmasked for as short as time as possible.

CONTACT TRACING & CLOSE CONTACTS

- Since DC contact tracers are limited, instruct city contact tracers to prioritize positive cases found in schools above other cases in the city, unless DC is willing to hire more contact tracers
- Consider all students who have been inside any room with an infected student at a distance of 6 feet or closer for 15 minutes or more as close contacts, and have them notified as such, and have them quarantine or test-to-stay in school. Consider all students who have been inside ANY room where students were NOT wearing masks as close contacts (e.g. in cafeterias during lunch, or in classrooms during breakfast or snack).
- Acknowledge that siblings and other household members are “close contacts” of an exposed student, and require they also quarantine or “test to stay” as long as the exposed student does. This should happen regardless of vaccination status of any household member.
- Include transportation to school, including OSSE provided transportation, in contact tracing

FILTRATION

- Do not allow students to spend any time in any indoor spaces that have subpar air circulation. This applies not only to classrooms, but Special Education and ELL service rooms, bathrooms, libraries, hallways, etc. Alternative spaces must be provided as needed until any inadequacies are fully addressed. Schools with inadequate air circulation include but are not limited to all those with standing work orders in DGS for HVACs in disrepair.
- Ensure every room has a HEPA filter with a CADR rating equivalent to the square footage of the room, or an equally effective filtration system.
- Ensure all spaces have adequate airflow and filtration during the colder months when the AC will not be used (many rooms use radiators for heat).
- Ensure filtration systems are monitored and serviced regularly, and filters are changed on time.
- Waive permits that are slowing down the work orders to fix filtration systems, as well as the work orders for any other repairs that would improve Covid-19 safety.

NOTIFICATION

- Ensure all close contacts, classrooms and school communities are notified of a case within 24 hours of the case being brought to the attention of the school, DC Health or DCPS.
- Count students and staff who develop symptoms within 10 days of being in a school building among the positives for those schools, and notify the classrooms and school communities accordingly (currently they are only counting within 2 days).

OUTDOOR MEALS & ACITIVITIES

- Waive permitting requirements that are hindering schools from offering outdoor lunch, breakfast and snacks (e.g. outdoor tents, using parking lots and streets).
- Provide all supports available to enable every school to have students eat outside, including schools that do not have well funded PTAs.
- PE should be offered outside where possible.
- Singing and wind instruments should not be allowed indoors without specialized protective gear for that activity.

DISTANCING

- Offer a virtual option to ALL students. This will reduce the number of students in schools, allowing for safer distancing.
- Instruct schools to adjust schedules and traffic patterns to ensure students are not crowded in hallways while changing classes.

MASKS

- Students must wear masks that are proven effective at protecting from the current Covid-19 strains. If DCPS does not have the funds to provide masks that are effective against the current Covid-19 strains, students should be instructed to wear double masks.
- Students or staff that have 3 mask violations in one day (removing mask or wearing improperly) must be sent home for the day.

VIRTUAL OPTION AND SUPPORT

- Offer a virtual option to all families without evidence of need. A deadly pandemic is need enough for all. All families deserve the right to determine if the risks to their family from sending children to school outweigh the benefits. This is especially true when we know the mitigations in place are NOT providing a reasonable level of protection.
- A significant benefit from offering a virtual option to all will be a reduction in the number of students attending school in-person, allowing for physical distancing and thereby making it safer for those attending in-person.
- Ensure students in quarantine are provided with devices, curricula and instruction that are necessary for them to keep up with their studies while they are out of school. Ensure that SpEd and ELL students receive these services. Services missed due to quarantine (or school closure or provider outage) for any student with an IEP should be made up within the school year.

REPORTING

- Direct the city to update all DCPS data (including school-level) on Covid-19 dashboards daily, and build in quality checks to make sure data is accurate.
- Count students and staff among the DCPS cases who develop symptoms within 10 days of being in a school building