

President Steve Stowe
First Vice President Dina Guirguis
Second Vice President/ELL Rep Robert Aguilar
Recording Secretary Alice Licato
Treasurer/Borough Appointee Inga Smolyar



Council Members

Alan Aja - IEP Rep Vito LaBella
Mauricia Cadillo Simeon Stolzberg - Borough
Yi Fang Chen Appointee
Adele Doyle

Administrative Assistant: Natalia Mondesir

District 20 Community Education Council Resolution 15 on the 2021-22 School Year

Resolution calling on the New York City Department of Education to effectively re-open public schools next fall and meet the needs of students affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic is a global event unprecedented in our lifetime, which has caused severe negative consequences to physical and mental health, the economy and employment, education and social emotional well-being. More than half a million people have lost their lives to COVID-19 in the United States alone and schooling has been interrupted for over a year.

Whereas New York City public schools opened late this school year and then offered blended (part-time in school and part-time remote) or fully remote learning options. Approximately 70% of students enrolled in fully remote learning. Initially the NYCDOE told parents they would have quarterly opportunities to opt in to blended learning, then reneged on that promise. The DOE later announced an opt-in period in April and although about 51,000 additional students signed up for blended learning, about two-thirds of New York City public school students are still learning remotely.¹

Whereas many students who opted to learn at school nevertheless spent a large portion of their school year learning remotely, either because of school building capacity constraints that limited how often students could be in their school building, teachers given accommodation to work remotely, or school or classroom closures due to COVID-19 infections. A majority of open elementary and District 75 schools have experienced closures of two to 10 days.² As of May 7, 2021 there were 16,835 classroom closures, 878 24-hour school closures, and 2,373 extended building closures.³

Whereas some schools have been able to offer their students in-person learning five days a week, many students are not experiencing anything close to a normal learning experience in

¹ <https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2021/4/12/22379752/de-blasio-nyc-schools-in-person-instruction>

² <https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2021/2/3/22264725/nyc-school-closures-covid-disruptions>

³ <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/school-year-20-21/return-to-school-2020/health-and-safety/daily-covid-case-map>

New York City public schools. Under current mitigation practices, some schools cannot accommodate all hybrid students wishing to return to full-time, in-person learning. Moreover, some of the students who have been able to return to their school buildings have found themselves sitting in front of computers still learning remotely from teachers who are not in the building.

Whereas the DOE acknowledged at a City Council hearing in January that half-way through the school year approximately 2,600 students were still unaccounted for.⁴

Whereas school closure policies have changed throughout the year. In November 2020 all New York City public schools closed for in-person learning based on the city-wide positivity rate. The DOE then abandoned its city-wide positivity rate criterion for closing schools with elementary schools re-opening in December, middle schools in February and high schools in March. Individual schools closures were triggered if two unrelated cases of coronavirus among staff and students were detected; on April 12, 2021, the DOE again changed its school closure policy when it announced “a school will only close if there are 4 or more confirmed COVID-19 cases from 4 different classrooms during a 7-day period, and the cases are traced to exposure inside the school as determined by the investigating team.”⁵

Whereas COVID-19 infection in schools is rare. A study published in the journal Pediatrics in March 2021 examined 234,132 individuals tested for Covid-19 in 1,594 New York City public schools from October 9 through December 18, 2020 and found 0.4% came back positive. The study concluded “When strict protocols were implemented for preventing, diagnosing, and managing school-associated cases, in-person learning in public schools was not associated with increased prevalence and incidence overall compared with the general community, and secondary transmission was infrequent.”⁶ According to a working paper by Casey Mulligan at the National Bureau of Economic Research, “Students and teachers at in-person school during 2020 were about 20 times more likely to be infected outside school than in school. According to the studies, an important reason that acquiring an infection at school is rare is that fewer than one out of two hundred students and staff that make close contact at school (e.g., share a class) with an infectious person tests positive for COVID-19.”⁷

Whereas mitigation efforts in schools, especially wearing masks, prevent most in-school infection. An April 2021 report in the journal Science found that “School-based mitigation measures are associated with significant reductions in risk, particularly daily symptoms

⁴ <https://gothamist.com/news/thousands-nyc-students-havent-connected-school-all-year-officials-say>

⁵ <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/news/chancellor-s-message-for-families>

⁶ <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/early/2021/03/05/peds.2021-050605.full.pdf>

⁷ https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w28619/w28619.pdf

screens, teacher masking, and closure of extra-curricular activities... While in-person schooling is associated with household COVID-19 risk, this risk can likely be controlled with properly implemented school-based mitigation measures.” Moreover, the Science report indicated “Notably, part-time in-person schooling is not associated with a decrease in the risk of COVID-19-related outcomes compared to full-time in-person schooling after accounting for other mitigation measures.”⁸ The study also found “found that when 7 or more mitigation measures were in place the positive association between in-person schooling and COVID-19 outcomes disappeared... Among those reporting 7 or more mitigation measures, over 80% reported student and teacher mask mandates, restricted entry, extra space between desks and no supply sharing, and over 50% reported student cohorting, reduced class size and daily symptom screening.”

Whereas a recent CDC study found evidence that when schools do not enforce precautions such as masking and allow students to sit less than three feet from each other, teachers can play a central role in COVID-19 transmission.⁹ The study authors noted that previous research has shown that even when community rates are high, transmission within schools can be prevented when staff and students implement all of the safety precautions.

Whereas the Department of Education has continued to change its distancing policies in schools. Social distancing is only one mitigation strategy of many and should not by itself prevent schools from opening full-time. According to the Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine, “Social distancing should be adapted and used alongside other strategies to reduce transmission, such as air hygiene, involving in part maximizing and adapting ventilation to specific indoor spaces, effective hand washing, regular surface cleaning, face coverings where appropriate and prompt isolation of affected individuals. Safe transmission mitigation measures depend on multiple factors related to both the individual and the environment, including viral load, duration of exposure, number of individuals, indoor versus outdoor settings, level of ventilation and whether face coverings are worn.”¹⁰

Whereas maintaining six feet of distancing between students may prevent some schools from effectively serving their students in person five days per week, especially in a district such as District 20 where almost every school is at or above capacity. The World Health Organization recommends “In areas with cluster-transmission of COVID-19, a risk-based approach should be taken when deciding whether to keep a distance of at least 1 metre [about three feet]

⁸ <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/early/2021/04/28/science.abh2939>

⁹ https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7008e4.htm?s_cid=mm7008e4_w

¹⁰ <https://www.cebm.net/covid-19/what-is-the-evidence-to-support-the-2-metre-social-distancing-rule-to-reduce-covid-19-transmission/>

between students.” It also recommends “In areas with sporadic cases/no cases of COVID-19, children under the age of 12 should not be required to keep physical distance at all times. Where feasible, children aged 12 and over should keep at least 1 metre apart from each other. Staff should always keep at least 1 metre from each other and from students and should wear a mask in situations where 1-metre distance is not practical.” The authors of a meta-analysis of 172 studies from 16 countries across six continents that was published in The Lancet noted that “From a policy and public health perspective, current policies of at least 1 m physical distancing seem to be strongly associated with a large protective effect...”¹¹

Whereas on May 9, 2021 the 7 day positivity rate was 2.47% in Bay Ridge, 2.72% in Dyker Heights/Bath Beach, and 2.32% in Borough Park.¹² These are all within the low to moderate range for transmission according to the CDC’s New Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Mitigation.¹³

Whereas ventilation is an important mitigation strategy in schools. According to the CDC, “Opening windows, using portable air cleaners, and improving building-wide filtration are ways you can increase ventilation in your school or childcare program.”¹⁴ The CDC recommends bringing in to schools as much outdoor air as possible.¹⁵ According to Mark Benden, director of the Ergonomics Center at the Texas A&M University School of Public Health, fully open windows fully open mean the indoor air is essentially indistinguishable from the outdoor air. Based on 10 year of data from 2010 to 2019, the average high temperature in New York City is 78 degrees in September, 66 degrees in October, and 54 degrees in November, so most classrooms can operate comfortably with windows fully open.¹⁶

Whereas the federal government reported that as of April 2021 the United States is still down 8.2 million jobs since February of 2020.¹⁷ The State of New York announced that many pandemic business restrictions will be eased starting May 19th. However, many parents cannot fully return to work until the school system provides again a full-time, 5 days a week learning option for their children.

¹¹ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)31142-9/fulltext#seccestitle10](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)31142-9/fulltext#seccestitle10)

¹² <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-data.page>

¹³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/indicators.html>

¹⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/ventilation.html>

¹⁵

¹⁶ <https://www.currentresults.com/Weather/New-York/Places/new-york-city-temperatures-by-month-average.php>

¹⁷ <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.nr0.htm>

Whereas a NY1/Ipsos poll conducted April 1-15, 2021 found that 58% of parents agreed their child is falling behind in school because of COVID-19 (24% strongly agreed their child is falling behind). Moreover, 58% agreed their child is, or would be, safe attending school in-person.¹⁸

Whereas about 21,000 or 28% of all teachers citywide received medical accommodations this year, according to the education department. At some schools as many as 40% percent of staff were granted medical accommodations. Education department officials have not indicated whether accommodations will be available next year and teacher union representatives have indicated that many teachers may require accommodations next year.¹⁹

Whereas public school teachers and staff will have had six months to get vaccinated by the start of the 2021-22 school year. According to the New York City Department of Health, as of March 1, 2021, eligibility for COVID-10 vaccination included “P-12 school or school district faculty or staff (includes all teachers, substitute teachers, student teachers, school administrators, paraprofessional staff and support staff including bus drivers).”²⁰

Whereas the ongoing risk of COVID-19 infection is a legitimate fear that must be balanced with educational and social emotional needs of students. The United States has historically operated schools while accepting the risk of transmittable diseases. For instance, examining the burden of flu between 2010 and 2020, the CDC “estimates that influenza has resulted in between 9 million – 45 million illnesses, between 140,000 – 810,000 hospitalizations and between 12,000 – 61,000 deaths annually since 2010.”²¹

Whereas there are significant risks to not opening schools full-time. Experts say that the pandemic is taking an outsized toll on young adults. Said Shekhar Saxena, professor of the practice of global mental health, “The figures that we have from the U.S. suggest that almost two-thirds of the young adults have some symptoms of anxiety or depression or other psychological problems.” He said that even when the COVID-19 crisis is over, 10% of these young people could have long-lasting effects from their current mental health issues.²²

Whereas the New York Times surveyed 175 pediatric infectious disease experts in February 2021 who “largely agreed that it was safe enough for schools to be open to elementary students for full-time and in-person instruction now.” Moreover, “80 percent of the experts

¹⁸ https://www.ny1.com/content/dam/News/static/nyc/pdfs/Spectrum_News_NY1_Poll_Apr_22.pdf

¹⁹ <https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2021/4/23/22400166/ny-high-school-zoom-remote-learning-teacher-accommodations>

²⁰ <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-vaccine-eligibility.page>

²¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/burden/index.html>

²² <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/pandemics-mental-health-burden-heaviest-young-adults/story?id=75811308>

said school districts should not base reopening decisions on infection data in the county at large; they should focus on virus cases inside the school.”²³

Resolution: The District 20 Community Education Council calls for the following:

School Year 2021-22:

1. The DOE should immediately begin planning to open all K-12 schools in September for five full days a week of face-to-face learning while maintaining a remote learning option for parents if they choose.
2. Planning should be transparent, with frequent and robust opportunities for parent input, and should include timelines for all decisions to be made between now and September 2021 as well as the criteria to be used for making those decisions.
3. The DOE should develop a communication campaign to inform parents well in advance about the instructional options for next school year, ensuring that there is no judgement about whether parents choose in-person or remote learning for their child.
4. Every effort should be made to ensure that all teachers and other school-based staff working in schools are all provided with COVID-19 vaccinations by August, 2021.
5. Schools should not provide remote learning to students who attend their school in person (i.e., no “Zoom in a room”) except as a last resort, e.g., to provide curriculum options that the school otherwise would not offer such as languages or computer science.
6. If distancing is still recommended in the fall, DOE schools should require no more than three feet of distancing in classrooms and encourage physical distancing to the extent possible in other areas of the building, including having staggered break periods and making hallways one-way to prevent students from passing in narrow corridors. Six feet of physical distancing should not be used as an absolute criteria for opening schools five days a week, especially for schools serving younger students.
7. Before students come back to school in the fall from an unprecedented year of remote and hybrid learning, provide teachers with at least five (5) full paid days of training and collaborative planning time to prepare for diagnostic assessment, trauma-informed curriculum, academic intervention and acceleration.
8. For students entering the school year with gaps in grade level standards, the DOE should prioritize tutoring and small group instruction that is targeted to specific assessed areas students need in order to actively participate in grade level work. Students should not have to repeat material they have already mastered.
9. The DOE should ensure robust ventilation and air filtering in all schools. Schools without mechanical ventilation systems should maintain open windows and have fans

²³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/11/upshot/schools-reopening-coronavirus-experts.html>

and filters in all classrooms and other spaces to the extent possible based on weather and temperature.

10. To allow individual schools and their site-based staff to focus on in-person teaching and learning, teachers should not provide remote instruction to students enrolled in their school. Instead, the DOE should implement a central remote learning program with a coherent curriculum aligned to state standards for all families that wish for their child to remain in remote learning during the 2021-22 school year. The remote learning program should be staffed by teachers that are experts and/or substantially trained in best practices for remote instruction. This program should be designed to continue and provide remote education in the future for all students who are unable to attend school in person, such as during severe weather events that shutter schools or for students who are ill or have been temporarily suspended.
11. Identify and administer a rigorous common assessment during the first month of school that will turnaround results quickly and provide useful and actionable data for teachers to use in planning to meet the needs of all students next year. Develop and communicate a clear assessment plan and timeline that includes how results will be shared with parents.
12. Each school should develop a plan for building trust with parents that includes frequent and clear communication with parents in their native language.
13. Ensure social emotional screening is implemented immediately at the beginning of the school year and all students have access to counselors and mental health services.
14. Identify all students who do not have adequate technology and Internet access and review technological needs of students, including access to effective writing interfaces (e.g., keyboards for older students) and security measures that prevent students from downloading appropriate learning software and apps.
15. Schools should leverage the technological innovations they have developed this year, including providing parents with opportunities to participate in school events such as PTA meetings, SLT meetings and parent-teacher conferences via video conferencing platforms.
16. Ensure that no school uses remote learning as a disciplinary measure. No student should lose access to learning within a school with a live teacher unless they are a serious disruption to the learning environment and have been provided due process when removed from a classroom or school.