



COMMUNITY EDUCATION COUNCIL DISTRICT 3

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August 25, 2020

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo
New York State Executive Chamber
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Mayor Bill de Blasio
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Governor Cuomo and Mayor De Blasio,

We, members of the Community Education Council for New York City's District 3 (CEC3) and the parent body that we represent, have not been provided a safe and pedagogically sound strategy to reopen our public schools. The Department of Education (DOE) should have had disaster plans in place long before the pandemic, but it didn't. Our government should have recognized the significance of this public health crisis when it had the chance, but it didn't. And the DOE has squandered these last five months, choosing to curate a political narrative, and to disseminate glossy, consultant-styled plans instead of working with stakeholders to put our children, families, teachers and staff first.

We therefore stand in solidarity with colleagues from across the city: CEC's, teachers and the United Federation of Teachers, principals and the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators, countless advocacy groups and a growing number of other elected officials, to delay the reopening plan for the 2020-2021 school year.

We take this position, knowing that District 3 Superintendent Christine Loughlin, D3 Principals and most of our schools are working harder than they ever have, to follow illogical orders put forth by the DOE. We know that our families are suffering and want schools to resume some semblance of normalcy. However, there are simply too many risks being taken and too many questions that remain unanswered.

Despite repeated attempts to gain a stronger sense of confidence with the reopening plans, CEC3 remains uncertain of the DOE's ability to execute a successful, safe re-entry plan with the necessary systems, protocols, and protections in place to provide all New York City families with the assurance that their children, teachers, principals, and community will be able to safely engage with in-person/blended learning.

Additionally, based on the fully-online learning approach attempted in spring of this year by the DOE and the lack of clear pedagogical planning and structure for this school year, we further believe that in the

absence of questions answered, information, and transparency provided, that the DOE is also not prepared to deliver a fully-remote student, teacher, and parent experience.

To this end, CEC3 would like to reiterate the following areas where we have concerns.

- In-school Safety
- Online Programming Delivery and Pedagogy
- General School Year
- IEP and ELL Students and Families

We have provided the questions from our community that relate to these concerns, those that remain unanswered, and considerations that have not been addressed or acknowledged. Note that questions regarding IEP and ELL students and families have been embedded in the other three sections below.

In-school Safety

By establishing a high mark for the infection rate in New York City, the Mayor and Chancellor have taken a positive step providing reasonable guidance for school leadership and have also established a strong measure for parent confidence in the health of our students, teachers and community. This single measure is not enough. The inconsistent ways that PPE has been addressed and is currently being rolled out to principals and school leadership is unacceptable and must be addressed immediately. What follows is the list of questions and considerations our community feels must be answered in order to build the needed confidence in the DOE's strategy. The overarching theme of these questions is not only safety but what trained professional or entity is responsible for assessing the safety measures being normed and adequately abided by, and how/when will this be happening during the school day? Our expectation is that accountability is not solely on the school principal, staff, and teachers. We feel they have enough on their shoulders with the day-to-day programming.

- On what date will all schools receive their complete supply of PPE?
- What is the approach and strategy for cleaning school facilities? What material and supplies will be used, and how will this impact the school day?
- How will PPE supplies be funded throughout the year and beyond since historically, principal's budgets have been supplemented by parents and PTAs as funding streams to provide basic cleaning supplies and school materials?
- Will there be temperature checks for teachers and students? How regularly will these be administered, and who will perform this duty?
- What is the recourse if non-compliance to any safety standards is discovered? How will the school, student body, teachers and principals be impacted?
- Will the isolation room be fully staffed throughout the school day? If so, by whom?
- Air quality: What standards will all schools be held to? Air changes/hr? Has SCA begun outfitting schools with additional fans to increase air-flow? By what date will this be completed across the city, district by district?
- Has ASHRAE been consulted during HVAC system evaluations, as recommended by the EPA?
- When will schools which will be staffed by new tier of H&H nurses get assigned their nurses?

- How will student traffic in the school building be monitored, i.e. bathrooms, public spaces, drop-off, and pick-up?
- What percentage of asymptomatic students will be tested for COVID 19 and how often?

Online Programming Delivery and Pedagogy

The following list of questions is much longer primarily because of a lack of transparency and because so little has been shared with the district as a whole. This is a significant miss by the DOE. By expecting schools to plan independently, in silos, without bringing stakeholders collectively to the table, the DOE has perpetuated a system that does not allow schools to cross collaborate or share best practices.

The overwhelming feedback from the families in District 3 was that the Mayor and the Chancellor's attempt to standardize and norm class cohorts based solely on square footage was myopic to the numbers based on social distancing but did not leave enough for a pedagogical framework that principals could equitably align to assuring all students would receive the exact same in-school experience across the city. This approach left too much responsibility on Principals to solve the problem for the DOE. Principals have done all they can with the limited resources and guidance. Our issue is not with how they have crafted their approach. Our issue is with the lack of thoughtful leadership to work closely with stakeholders to understand what the pain points and frustrations were during the onset of the pandemic and through the remaining 2019-2020 school year.

The following questions call for thoughtful solutions and transparency, asking that parent leaders, school communities, teachers, principals, and students be at the table to develop a collaborative plan for school programming, meeting parent expectations, active participation in remote-learning, defining what the school day will encompass, and how students will be evaluated.

As stated previously: with project planning in a complex system and environment, a date must be determined by which all of these answers to these questions will be implemented.

- Will the DOE provide every school that needs teachers for live instruction with additional personnel from the central offices and from the ATR pool?
- When will all school specific pedagogical plans (blended and fully-remote) be available for parents? If these plans are not standardized across the district, why? And how has the DOE addressed inequities across the city if plans show inequitable opportunities for students?
- Will schools have to pay for additional, ATR teachers from their own budgets?
- What will the standardized approach to assessment and grading look like for the city? What accountability measures will be in place ensuring that all students are equitably evaluated based on student need and support? Last year's pass/fail model does not provide enough granularity for principals, teachers, and parents to assess whether standards have been met.
- The current schedules are confusing to some families. Families need an effective and clear way to keep track of what days their children are expected in the school building or will be remote (for blended-learning students). This is especially challenging for families with students in different schools, different grades, and different cohorts. Visual aids are recommended. Additionally, if a child does show up on the wrong day, what actions will be taken?

- What is the criteria for granting programming exemptions?
- What if schools don't have enough teachers to conduct in-building teaching due to health exemptions? If a significant percentage of a school's teachers have accommodation, will a school be able to move to 100% remote instruction?
- Are there enough teachers available in-person for all schools in case of sick days? Or is substitute support remote only?
- What expectations are there for after school programming? Our expectation is that this will be standardized and normed to some extent to ensure that all families that participate in afterschool programs are receiving safe, appropriate extracurricular activities?
- How many hours of screen time are schools planning to deliver for blended and for fully-remote families? It will help to understand what the standards across schools and grades will be in place.
- How many hours per day are required of teachers to be available; especially teachers with families?
- How will parents/caregivers be supported with technology issues?
- How can parents request for compensatory services for students who did not receive all required services?
- What does 100% remote learning mean for students with 504 plans?
- What if a parent does not want a student to receive related services remotely?
- How will the DOE support students with IEP's and ensure students with IEPs engage with their related service providers? How will IEP mandates be met for fully-remote students?
- What additional supports are being provided for students in temporary housing?
- What additional supports are being provided for ELL students?
- How will DOE ensure every child in District 3 has uninterrupted access to electronic devices?
- Advocates for Children of New York specifically recommends that children with IEPs receive robust behavioral and mental health support, and are not subject to police interventions, which pre-COVID often included referral to School Safety Agents. How will DOE support students with Behavior Implementation Plans?
- How will IEP mandates for 1:1 paraprofessionals be met?
- What about additional services including occupational therapy, speech therapy and others?
- How will schools work collaboratively with families to address overall academic progress for their children with IEPs and ELL's?

General School Year

- What is the first day of school? When will the school calendar for the year be released?
- Will there be busing? Will there be busing for special needs students?
- Will budget appeals be granted?
- Will free meals still be provided once the school year begins?
- How will the middle school and high school application process be conducted this year?
- Will there be flexibility in the length of the school day?
- What plans are being made to provide students with disabilities transportation?

Students, families, teachers and staff deserve better from the DOE. CEC3 expects practical plans, transparency, and responsible operations from the DOE. As of today, what we have seen is not sufficient. As of today, what has been presented to parents poses risks to our health and is woefully inadequate for

teaching and learning in these conditions. The following conclusions represent what we believe to be the most important next steps for our students and families.

District 3 Priorities for Next Steps

- Develop and standardize fully-remote learning across New York City to ensure equitable pedagogy, access to curriculum, and adequate ability for families to manage work-life balance.
- Reactivate and expand REC centers so that the children of essential workers and vulnerable students are able to be accommodated in person.
- Hire, train and introduce full time nurses to every school building, and communicate full protocol and logistics plan for in person operations.
- Develop in person learning plans for elementary school students
- Deliver a blended in-class/remote student, parent, and teacher experience
 - This assumes a financial plan for safety protocols for PPE and nurses that demonstrates full funding and sustainability beyond the 2020-2021 school year.
- Deliver a plan for the fully-remote IEP student, parent, and teacher experience.
 - This assumes a legal measure for IEPs that provides an addendum for fully-remote support for students with IEPs to be executed for all candidate students and families.

Public school parents had to fight for schools to close in the spring because the main considerations for making the decision were political. We find ourselves back in essentially the same position, calling on you to act based on evidence and facts instead of political motivations and bureaucratic justification. New York may have been successful in lowering the positive case rate across our city, but medical experts have already countered that the likelihood is high for a resurgence in COVID19 cases if NYC proceeds with this plan.

We demand answers to all of our questions. We do not support the reopening plan given the existence of so many unanswered questions and therefore oppose the opening of schools on September 10, 2020. We call on you to make our children, and the adults that take care of them, your top priority. Our parent leaders want to assist, so please reach out if you would like our help.

Respectfully,

CEC3

cc: Chancellor Richard Carranza
Executive Superintendent, Manhattan, Marisol Rosales
District 3 Superintendent Christine Loughlin
Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer
NYC Public Advocate Jumaane Williams
NYC Comptroller Scott Stringer
NYS Regents Member, 1st District, Nan Eileen Mead
Panel for Educational Policy Member Michael Kraft
Panel for Educational Policy Member Thomas Sheppard
Panel for Educational Policy Member Shannon Waite
City Councilmember Mark Treyger
City Councilmember Helen Rosenthal

City Councilmember Bill Perkins
City Councilmember Mark Levine
State Assembly Member Linda Rosenthal
State Assembly Member Daniel J. O'Donnell
State Assembly Member Inez Dickens
State Assembly Member Richard N. Gottfried
State Assembly Member Robert J. Rodriguez
State Senator John Liu, Chair, Subcommittee on NYC Education
State Senator Shelley Mayer, Chair, Committee on Education
State Senator Brian Benjamin
State Senator Brad Hoylman
State Senator Robert Jackson
State Senator Jose M. Serrano
U.S. Congressman Adriano Espaillat
U.S. Congressman Jerrold L. Nadler
United Federation of Teachers President Michel Mulgrew
Community Board 7 Chair Mark Diller
Community Board 10 Chair Cicely Harris