



COMMUNITY EDUCATION COUNCIL DISTRICT 15

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August 17, 2020

Dear Governor Cuomo, Mayor De Blasio and Chancellor Carranza,

We respectfully write to you as parents and members of the Community Education Council of District 15 in support of NYCDOE principals in Districts 15 and 13 who are asking for a delay and phase-in of in-person learning in the fall. They justifiably cite a lack of guidance and information from the NYCDOE in order to prepare for a safe return to schools. They have concerns about ventilation, PPE, nurses, staffing, implementation of remote learning, outdoor learning, and services for students with disabilities, learning difficulties and multilingual learners. A similar letter from the Council of School Administrators supports the concerns and recommendations of our principals.

We thank the Mayor and Chancellor for this week's announcement of guaranteed nursing coverage in every public school building and all early childhood programs across the city. We have heard from the Office of School Facilities on plans to ensure every classroom has proper ventilation either through properly functioning windows or the installation of MERV 13 filters. We have assurances that the necessary PPE is being safely stored off-site. And Deputy Chancellor Goldmark has stated that guidance on outdoor learning will be forthcoming.

Nevertheless, the requests of our principals and the union representing them must be heard and answered in order for our families to feel comfortable sending their children to school. As we get closer to the start of school, anxiety amongst parents and principals has grown because information has been piecemeal. Questions about staffing and logistics remain amid a hiring freeze due to City and State budget cuts on top of enrollment declines. The concerns of school communities in neighborhoods with Covid rates higher than the city average, such as Sunset Park, urgently need to be addressed. We trust and respect the judgement of our principals in proposing a delay and phase-in. We also trust that they understand that long-term remote-only learning is unacceptable.

We all must learn to learn in a world with Covid. Our city enjoys a 1% Covid positivity rate due to the hard work and risks taken by our first responders and the cooperation of all New Yorkers, including our principals and teachers who risked their lives to educate our children at the onset of Covid. We also acknowledge the efforts of our DOE to submit a plan for in-person learning, as our children have had no in-person education for almost 7 months now. Other states have no hope of any in-person learning for some time. We cannot squander this hard fought window of opportunity for students to learn in-person, but our Governor, Mayor and NYCDOE must answer fears with a well-funded, comprehensive plan.

Let's take this opportunity to delay and stagger the introduction of in-person learning. Let's give our elementary students, who benefit the most from in-person learning, a safe and appropriate setting while developing appropriate and rigorous remote learning curriculums for middle and high school students, who are more apt to spread the virus. Let's take this opportunity to create guidance for funded outdoor learning plans, particularly for older students. And let's ensure our teachers have all the necessary tools to limit their own interactions with students and colleagues as they are most personally at risk.

New Yorkers can do anything, including learn to learn in a health crisis, because we must. We may be living with Covid for the foreseeable future. There may not be an effective vaccine next year or the year after. Therefore, we must give our schools the tools to adapt in-person learning to Covid. Please grant our principals' request for a delay, allow adults to return first, and stagger the in-person reopening so that everyone can adapt. Failure to reopen schools safely comes at great cost to humanity. We must educate the next generation of doctors, scientists and vaccine creators. Help NYC show the rest of the country how it's done. It's go time.

Sincerely,

The Members of CEC15

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