

# Strengthening DC's Public Schools In COVID-19: May 2020

COVID-19 has highlighted the value that public schools bring to our communities--as places of learning, centers of relationship building, and safety nets. Even in the face of the mayor providing a 3% increase in the UPSFF for FY21, the effect of COVID-19 in our city and schools means that projected municipal revenue losses will be severe when our school needs them the most. This crisis has had a profound impact on students of color, students who are economically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities. The Coalition for DC Public Schools and Communities (C4DC) believes that we must rise immediately to the challenge of reducing structural inequities in our schools, allowing us both to address deep needs while being wise in our use of public funds.

**Recognize that DCPS schools of right are key to the reopening of schools, enabling the recovery of our economy.**

It is critical that every student has a neighborhood school that is a hub for education and support. DC taxpayers have stressed the importance of a municipally run system of DCPS schools of right in every neighborhood. (See [here](#) at page 6 and [here](#) at page 18.) DC's dual system of schools of right and charter schools is costly, with duplicative offerings, dispersed enrollment, and instability in openings and closures, creating both family uncertainty and inadequately resourced schools. We can ensure educational experiences and resourcing are excellent and equitable, and save money, by stabilizing and adequately funding our DCPS system of neighborhood schools of right.

--Ensure high-quality and resourced DCPS schools of right in every neighborhood, because they are key to the recovery of communities from COVID-19, providing stability, excellent education, food, consistent rules and rights, and needed resources.

--Commit to no FY21 budget cuts for schools educating the highest percentages or numbers of our at-risk students. Prioritize investment in supports for these schools to address digital divide issues, food insecurity, lack of access to high-quality health care and behavioral support, and lack of special education services, while also ensuring those schools have equitable teacher training, experience, and retention.

--Commit to no co-locations of charter schools and DCPS schools. Once school reopens, DCPS communities will need their entire school buildings. This will allow for social distancing due to the generous amount of space in the facilities and school grounds; good air quality because of modern ventilation systems and new windows; and high levels of cleaning because of the capabilities of the in-house custodial staff.

--Encourage increasing enrollment at DCPS schools of right, which provides a return on investment in existing infrastructure, reduces per pupil charter school facility allowances, and reduces public transit use, thereby saving money budgeted for the Kids Ride Free program.

--Protect funding for out-of-school time programs because working families need childcare support. Multiple childcare options will continue to attract families to local schools. Better collaboration between DCPS, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and nonprofit organizations to ensure adequate before- and after-school programming must be considered.

**Provide immediate support for distance learning and safe and healthy school environments when students return to school.**

COVID-19 has put a spotlight on racial, economic, and social divides in our city, exposing harmful gaps in student experiences and learning outside school. Given uncertainty about returning to school, we must take immediate measures to provide learning support for our schools and students during this crisis.

--Disseminate clear and achievable plans for student, school, and educator accountability and progress in re-opening.

--[Institute education plans created by DC teachers](#) to address social distancing, enrollment, and the digital divide.

--Fund appropriate digital resources for all students participating in distance learning, prioritizing vulnerable student populations (see [Digital Equity in DC Education recommendations for Re-Open DC](#)).

--[Ensure safe and healthy school environments when students return to schools](#).

--Support the safe passage initiative of the Office of the Student Advocate and ensure its work with DCPS continues and expands, so all children responsible for making it to and from school on their own can do so safely.

--Ensure robust communication with school communities in multiple languages when school starts. DCPS must work with community partners/lay translators who have strong relationships with non-English-speaking parents/guardians. Ensuring community partnerships are well aware of the expectations of the “new normal” will allow parents to have multiple resources for clarity.

**Stop the creation of new schools and expansions in neighborhoods with vulnerable feeder patterns.**

COVID-19’s fiscal effect means we can no longer afford the experiment of opening new schools to provide a lottery chance for families to choose a school. The amendment in the Budget Support Act providing for co-location of charter schools in DCPS buildings is the wrong way to go as DCPS expands and improves. The unregulated growth of DC charters in the last 20 years has been out of proportion to DC’s student population. This has resulted in millions of taxpayer dollars spent on schools that closed, a 40% school closure rate, and thousands of unfilled seats, while 10 new schools opening in 2020 have a fraction of their seats filled. Each empty seat means resources are spread more thinly across existing schools. Significant municipal savings

could be realized by investing in existing schools while ensuring both stability and meaningful school choice.

--Save money by enacting a moratorium on the approval and opening of any DCPS or charter school for FY21, unless needed to ensure a DCPS by-right choice for families.

--Stop the expansion of new campuses for existing charter schools for five years.

--Commit to no school closures for FY21, ensuring stability and reducing trauma.

### **Address structural inequities that disadvantage DCPS.**

LEA funding structurally disadvantages DCPS. The DCPS budget is based on a modest projection (around 2%) over expected October enrollment to address midyear arrivals and churn. Charter LEAs are funded based on October enrollment, despite the fact that more than 1300 students leave charter LEAs after the audit. While charter LEAs retain nearly \$25 million associated with those departing students, DCPS doesn't receive funds for students it will serve as a result of that churn. And the cushion in DCPS to address midyear arrivals and churn is even smaller (1%) in the proposed FY21 budget.

--Provide at least a 2% allocation in the FY21 budget for DCPS midyear arrivals and churn, to enable DCPS to more fully serve its students with the greatest needs, who are often at schools experiencing the greatest churn. See [here](#) under Adjusting DCPS Enrollment..

--Close the disparate funding gap for maintenance and operations (M&O). DCPS typically pays more than \$1000 per student in UPSFF funds for M&O, while charters pay \$500 per student. This disparate treatment fiscally disadvantages matter-of-right schools on which our communities rely. See [here](#) under A More Equitable Way..

The following organizations of C4DC are ready to work with you to support these investments and address these inequities, so DC's students and schools will be on fiscally and educationally sound paths. It is time to strengthen, invest, and grow DCPS.

Signed:

[Ward 1 Education Council](#)

[Ward 3/Wilson Feeder Education Network](#)

[Ward 4 Education Alliance](#)

Ward Five Education Equity Committee

[Ward 6 Public Schools Parent Organization \(W6PSPO\)](#)

[Ward 7 Education Council](#)

Ward 8 Education Council

[21st Century School Fund](#)

[Decoding Dyslexia](#)

[DCEmpower Ed](#)

[In the Public Interest](#)

[Senior High Alliance of Parents Principals and Educators \(S.H.A.P.P.E.\)](#)

[Teaching for Change](#)

[Washington Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights](#)

[Washington Teachers' Union](#)

[Education Town Hall](#)

[Education DC](#)