



PAVE Parent Leaders' Statement of Beliefs

*Our Vision for a Family-Centered DC Education System
in Response to COVID-19*

Updated December 22, 2020

[#DCSchoolsRecovery](#)

WHO WE ARE

Our Mission

PAVE connects, informs, and empowers parent leaders to give families in DC a voice and choice in the vision for education in our city.

Our Vision

Parents are partners and leaders with schools and policymakers to develop a diversity of safe, nurturing, and great schools for every child in every ward and community.



Our History

PAVE was founded in April 2016 because we believe that for too long, parents have been informed of our education policy decisions after they have already been made instead of being invited to the table to help make them. Since 2016, PAVE has grown into a network of 5,000 DC parents and caregivers united behind a vision for an education system that is created not just for, but by and with families and guided by the following core values:

- Value #1: All families have access to high-quality schools and the information they need to make the best decisions for their children.
- Value #2: All schools have adequate and equitable funding to support the needs of children and families.
- Value #3: All students have a safe, healthy, and welcoming school environment.
- Value #4: All students have access to out-of-school time and summer school programs that allow them to foster their passions and enrich their learning.
- Value #5: All parents have the resources they need to support the success of their children at home and in school.

You can find more about PAVE parent leaders and their incredible work and accomplishments [here](#) and in their [Parents' Bill of Rights for the DC Education System](#).

Our Vision for a Family-Centered DC Education System in Response to COVID-19

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic crisis have presented DC with an unprecedented challenge that will require an unprecedented response from our elected officials. Since the beginning of the pandemic, more than **24,000 Washintonians have been infected with the virus** and more than **700 have died**, and the **vast majority are Black and brown**. There have been more than **160,000 unemployment claims** and nearly **15,000 have left the District completely**, seeking safety and opportunity elsewhere. We are still learning the full extent of the learning loss among DC's students, but the data we do have is showing **opportunity gaps across race and income widening at an alarming rate** and that **too many kids and families - mostly families of color and low-income families - are not getting the support they need**.

Last March, as the scale of the pandemic started to become clear, PAVE parent leaders shifted their focus to how best to **respond** to the pandemic in the **short-term** and **recover** in the **coming year**. The result of that pivot was a **Statement of Beliefs which laid out PAVE parent leaders' vision for response and recovery**. PAVE parent leaders then set about advocating for that vision with policymakers, elected officials and school leaders; and despite strong budgetary pressures the Mayor and DC Council listened to parent voices. While state and local jurisdictions across the country slashed education budgets, DC managed to increase per-pupil funding by 3% and increase funding for school-based mental health by \$3.3 million amongst other essential supports. This was a strong first step forward, but there is more we must do for DC students and families.

Over the past few months, PAVE parent leaders have revisited what is needed for response, recovery, and now school *re-opening* in the face of the ongoing Coronavirus crisis. The result was a revised Statement of Beliefs, which calls on DC officials to do the following:

1. **Continue to meet and expand support for families' basic needs** by ensuring that all families have access to:
 - food and groceries,
 - resources such as relief benefits, housing and utilities, and;
 - health care and child care.
2. **Building a family-centered education system** by:
 - bolstering distance learning;
 - creating a safe and equitable plan for returning to school in-person;
 - investing in and strengthening systems that support kids and families, including but not limited to **fully-funding the UPSFF per-pupil and at-risk funding formulas, and fully funding the next wave of school-based mental health expansion**; and
 - improving cross-sector coordination and communication, as well as developing and sharing best practices for partnering with families and communities.

With the continued shutdowns from rising cases of the virus, we know that DC now faces an even more challenging budget landscape than last year and understand that difficult decisions will have to be made to meet many of these goals. But we know that as a District, we cannot afford to balance our budget on the backs of the students and families most affected by this crisis. This moment demands that we step up for DC families, take bold action to do more for those that need support the most, and continue to make progress to making this family-centered vision a reality. This moment demands that we center our budget, which is a reflection of our values, in equity.

THE PROBLEM

Coronavirus, or COVID-19, has exacerbated existing systemic issues and created new problems that have put our city in an unprecedented crisis. Coronavirus has drastically impacted our **health, economy, education system**, and, **for many DC parents, the ability to meet their family's basic needs.**

- As of December 16, 2020 there have been over [25,830 positive COVID-19 cases](#) and **704 people have lost their life** to the virus in DC - undoubtedly leaving many more with trauma, grief, and loss.
- **The majority of COVID-19 related deaths have been people of color.** According to the [2019 Census data](#), 46% of DC residents are Black and 46% of DC residents are white. However, [over 74% of all lives lost from COVID-19 have been Black and only 10% of all lives lost were white](#). Structural and institutional racism have long led to a cycle of poverty and disparate access to health care and healthy living environments, therefore causing disproportionately negative health outcomes.
- Since the start of the pandemic in March 2020, as of December 2020 there have been over [162,358 filed unemployment claims in DC](#), with many facing ever-increasing anxiety about how to put food on the table, pay rent, or receive basic medicine and supplies for their families due to loss of work and income - especially those who are excluded from relief benefits like undocumented immigrants.

THE IMPACT

The pandemic has persisted longer than anyone expected, and the impacts are much wider than we ever imagined. So, what does that mean for kids, families, and schools?

Compounding Issues Mean Greater Challenges for Families

As the pandemic endures in DC and across the country, the trauma and hardship from a multitude of challenges compounds and families who were already struggling are now bearing an even greater weight.

- **Increase in gun violence and homicide:** 2020 has had the most homicides in DC since 2008.
 - As of December 18, there have been [200 homicides this year](#). 86.5% of the homicides were a result of increased gun violence.
 - 43% of homicides occurred in Southeast DC. Across the District, 29 of homicide deaths were under the age of 19.
 - The increase in homicide and gun violence has been attributed to the fact that [many of the best ideas for reducing violence have not been accessible during the pandemic](#).
 - Facilities like schools, churches, libraries, sport leagues, and recreation centers have been scaled back and closed. Programs that are specifically designed to reduce gun violence, such as summer jobs programs, violence interventions, and group behavioral therapy have either been canceled or moved online, which has significantly affected the efficacy of these programs.
- **Increases in domestic violence:** [Drops in reporting](#) indicated that many survivors were unable to seek help while spending more time at home with their abuser. Women, particularly women of color, lower-income, undocumented immigrant women, Native women, and LGBTQ people are experiencing higher rates of domestic violence.
- **Underreported cases of child abuse:** On average, teachers and other community professionals report more than [two-thirds of child abuse cases](#). When schools closed in March, many centers reported drastic drops in the number of reports.
 - Nationwide, there were nearly 40,000 fewer cases, a 21% drop compared to last year's cases. Child abuse did not decrease; educators are not able to catch it during distance learning.
- **Intensified housing insecurity:** DC Council passed a law that prevents people from being evicted until the Mayor's public health emergency order ends. But from just March 17 to May, when the Council's bill went into effect, [landlords filed about 1,100 eviction complaints](#). This means many are at risk of eviction as soon as the public health emergency ends and could be facing homelessness. Even before the pandemic, [research](#) found that 11 out of every 100 renters in DC experienced an eviction filing. In Wards 7 and 8, that rate is nearly doubled with 20 out of 100 and 25 out of 100 people experiencing eviction, respectively.

Pandemic Intensifies Already Pervasive Racial Inequity

Racial disparities across income, employment, education, housing, access to health care, and more are apparent and more egregious than ever before.

- **Racial wealth gap:** Families with more wealth are able to provide more and higher-quality educational opportunities for their children, who are, as a result, [exposed to more opportunities to attain wealth themselves](#) preventing many, predominantly Black families and families of color from increasing their wealth.
- **Unemployment:** DC's unemployment rate in [November 2020 is 7.5%](#); however, the unemployment rates in Wards 7 and 8, areas which are both almost entirely Black, are 12.8% and 16.7%, respectively. Nationwide, Latinx women and Black women experience the highest levels of unemployment of any racial groups.
- **Income inequality:** In 2019, the top 20% of households in DC had an average income of about \$362,000, which is [26 times larger](#) than the average income for households in the bottom 20%.
 - This income inequality is highly racialized as white median household income was more than three times the Black median income and 1.5 times the Latinx median income.
 - In DC, Black households make up 21.6% of households in poverty and Latinx households make up 8.8%.
- **Cycle of poverty:** Children who experience poverty are [more likely to drop out of school, experience irregular employment, and live in poverty as adults](#), which continues the systemic, intergenerational cycle of the racial income gap.
 - [16% of all adults who live with children in DC do not have enough food.](#)
- **Disparate challenges for essential workers:** [Black people are disproportionately represented in the essential workforce](#), which risks the health of these workers and their families. Additionally, essential workers are required to expend more resources to ensure their children are able to receive support and instruction during distance learning.
 - The costs of wifi, technology, and child care or other caregivers further complicate managing housing and food security.
 - Black women are more likely to experience the largest economic losses as the labor market further diminishes during the pandemic.

Impact on Student Mental Health

The persistent COVID-19 impacts have led students of all ages to [experience chronic stress and trauma](#). Kids miss their friends and are feeling isolated. Many may not be able to receive all of the support services they

need and some are dealing with extended time in unhealthy living environments, new roles as tutors or caregivers to siblings, or even interpreters and translators - all added stressors during an already difficult time.

- **Increased anxiety:** Students have reported an increase in anxiety that is directly related to the pandemic.
 - In an [EmpowerK12 survey](#), 77% of DC students surveyed are concerned about the health of their family, and one in five students have recently experienced the loss of a family member that they live with.
 - In the same survey, 45% of students reported that their family's financial situation has become somewhat or significantly more stressful due to the pandemic.
- **Lacking "normal" outlets:** It is evident that students are coping with a lot of new stressors from the effects of the pandemic, but there are few outlets or sources of relief as [two-thirds of students have been unable to participate in an activity](#) that they normally do and makes them happy.

Impact on Parents/Guardians

Overall, parents and families are stressed because of the multitude of persistent, daily challenges including, but not limited to, paying bills (and in some cases, covering increased costs due to the pandemic) putting food on the table each day, managing their children's learning and their own jobs, and addressing health concerns. This is taking an outsize toll on their [mental health](#), especially as the burden has continued over a series of months.

- Our [spring](#) and [fall](#) surveys, with 320 and 939 responses respectively, asked parents about the challenges and stressors that COVID-19 and its implications created. Many of the challenges that parents experienced in the spring have carried through to the fall:
 - In both surveys, nearly half of the parents named managing their children's education at home as a top challenge.
 - Other top challenges were job/income instability, housing and rent insecurity, and not getting good information from the city.
 - Even though many parents and families are experiencing additional challenges, the distribution of COVID-19 effects have not been spread evenly. For many families living East of the River, Spanish-speaking families, and families who receive services (including TANF, SNAP, etc.), their challenges are compounded and impact nearly every facet of their lives.
 - With transition to distance learning and in some cases parents working from home, access to the internet has been a challenge especially when multiple devices are needed. Although 94% of all participants surveyed in September reported having access to wifi, the reliability and quality of the internet connection varied among respondents. The cost of upgrading the

internet to accommodate for streaming and higher use has been a significant barrier for adequate access across the District.

Impact on Schools

Many schools in DC were already underfunded and understaffed. Now, the pandemic has forced schools to adjust nearly every aspect of their instruction, provide students with basic supports like hot spots, devices, food, and more, and rethink family engagement.

- **Enrollment drops:**

- According to the [DC Fiscal Policy Institute](#), the city has enrolled about 500 fewer students than were enrolled during the fall in the 2019-2020 school year. Because DCPS and public charter Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are funded based on the projected number of enrolled students, the 500 fewer students will lead to a potential loss of at least \$5.6 million for the public school system. Looking ahead to one of the tightest budget years ever, the total impact of any drop in students and resulting reduction in funding - let alone learning loss - could be massive.
- Further, an [estimated 15,000 people](#) moved out of DC during the pandemic. It's possible that some of those families kept their kids enrolled this year with remote learning, but would not enroll next year. The drop in population would further diminish funding for schools and tax revenue for the District.

- **School leader stressors and challenges:**

- [Pre-COVID](#), many school leaders experienced substantial job-related stress and lacked sufficient guidance and resources to respond appropriately to a variety of issues. Now with the uncertainties of COVID, [many principals and school leaders](#) named that work-life balance, the health concerns of their faculty, staff, and students, and providing a quality education for their students are the three main stressors that they are consistently experiencing.
- Further, putting supports and systems in place for virtual and/or hybrid learning and health guidance requires a specific operations skill set that even the strongest or most experienced school leaders may not have. Lack of support by the district office or board of education were also noted as key stressors.

Impacts on Learning

The impacts of Coronavirus have disproportionately affected Black, brown students and low-income students across the country and the District.

- **Racial and income-level opportunity gap widens in both directions:** White and affluent students often have more access to high-quality in-person and personalized support, and, in some cases, [are even](#)

[gaining faster than before the pandemic](#). Black, brown, and low-income kids often have less access to those opportunities and are not growing at nearly the same rate. This unprecedented gap and the long-lasting impacts will undoubtedly have an impact on the future of work and the economy - but the extent and scope remains unknown.

- **In just this school year**, at-risk students have lost, on average, [5 months of learning in math and 4 months of learning in reading](#) compared to a 4 month and 1 month slide respectively for all students.
 - On average, **55% of students who are at-risk are 2+ grade levels behind in math**, which is an increase of 8% from the previous year.
 - While at-risk students and students of color are falling behind, white students are actually gaining faster than before the pandemic in some areas. In reading, at-risk students only grew by **58% from last school year, while, on average, white students grew by 176%**.
- **Digital divide and disconnect:** It is important to note that any data about how students are doing only accounts for the students schools have been able to reach. The NWEA [reported](#) that, when compared to fall 2019, the number of students who took the test in fall 2020 fell by 25%, which predominantly included students of color and low-income students.
 - All assessments given during COVID-19 must be examined through a critical lens and account for the fact that many students' achievement, who are predominantly lower income and students of color, are not properly represented because of systemic economic, health, technological, or other barriers.
- **Early literacy warnings:** Early literacy is an important indicator for future academic success; those who are not reaching early targets are more likely to progress slower throughout the remainder of their time in school. In DC, the number of kindergarteners who are not hitting their early literacy targets significantly decreased by [11 percentage points](#), first graders decreased by 12, and second graders decreased by seven, when compared to the fall 2019 data.
- **Beyond K-12 impact:** Academic gaps don't start at Kindergarten and don't stop at 12th grade.
 - **Early education:** [Enrollment is down](#) in early childhood programs in DC and nationally - which was a major part of what [fueled DC's growth](#) and not just in academics - but also the maternal workforce and population. When free universal PreK passed, [more families](#) with young children chose to stay in the city in order to take advantage of the free option and [11% more women were able to return to work](#).
 - **Higher education:** Nationwide, across all types of institutions, undergraduate enrollment has [decreased by 2.5% this year](#).
 - Across all types of colleges, [enrollment for low-income high school graduates decreased by 29.2%](#), while at community colleges, the drop for low-income students was 37.1%.

- A recent [analysis](#) of FAFSA data found that students from families with incomes under \$75,000 are two times twice as likely to say they “canceled all plans” to take classes this fall as students from families with incomes over \$100,000.
- Another [national report](#) found that only 13% of college dropouts ever return, and even fewer graduate.
- **Special education:** Children with an IEP are not only falling behind academically, but they are [at risk of missing developmental milestones](#) and losing the necessary skills for an independent life.
 - Even though all accommodations and supports are required by law, many students aren’t receiving what they need.
 - Occupational therapists and other specialists are not able to effectively provide services to children virtually, and parents of students with special needs do not feel equipped to help teachers and specialists fulfill their children’s IEP.
 - In math, students with an IEP, on average, have [experienced a 43% decline](#) in their expected growth from Fall 2019 to Fall 2020. In reading, students with an IEP have increased by 7%; however, the reading levels have a clear racial disparity. On average, a Black student with disabilities has experienced a drop of 33% in their expected growth. White students with disabilities have experienced an increase of 28% in their expected reading growth.

RESPONSE IN DC

In the wake of COVID-19, DC has provided a number of supports to families including providing food, preventing residents from getting evicted from their homes, expanding access to COVID-19 testing, and supporting child care for essential workers. In the latest budget, DC also made unprecedented investments in education when most cities or states saw massive cuts, alongside additional investments in school-based mental health supports, early childhood programs, and more.

#ParentPriorities in the DC FY21 Budget!

 3% increase in Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF)	 +\$300k for funding for at-risk students	 Almost +\$4M for social emotional learning	 +\$3.3M for school-based mental health	 +\$5M for emergency child care funding, +\$1.4M for FY21
 +\$6.9M distance learning supports (tech, internet)	 +\$9M for relief for excluded workers	 +\$500k for Out of School Time (OST) programs	 Funding to implement your #WeBudgetTogether vision	

While each of those investments and additional supports have been important, more is still needed. There are still many families who don't have their basic needs met and we do not have a comprehensive and coordinated plan for safely reopening schools and supporting learning throughout the pandemic.

DCPS offered a limited number of opportunities to hear from families about their vision, needs, and concerns. At the start of the 2020-2021 school year, DCPS was not able to get buy-in from the teachers' union in their reopening plan, which resulted in the postponement of opening up some in-person learning options with teachers. Instead, they opened [CARE classrooms](#) at a limited number of schools, which don't have teachers to support instruction, rather an adult supervising students engaging in distance learning at school instead of at home. There are some public charter schools that have offered various types of engagement opportunities and/or [in-person learning options](#), but many are still working on plans for broader in-person reopening.

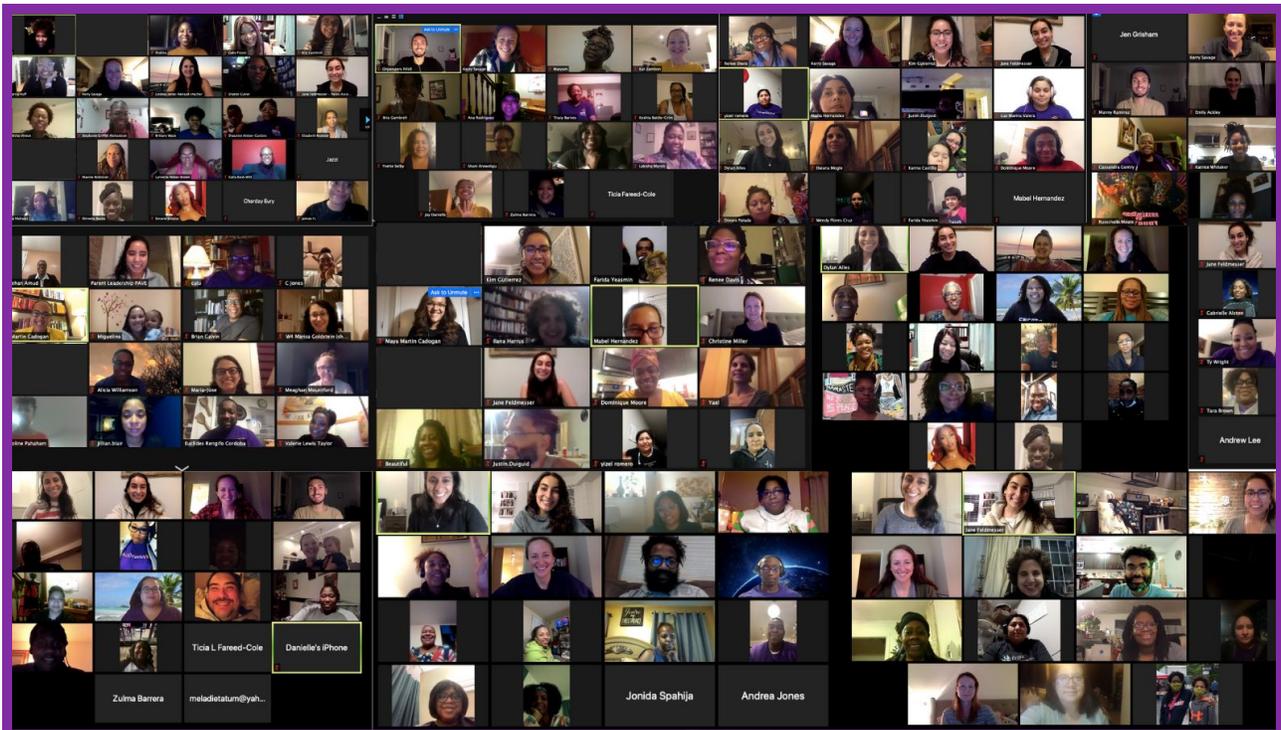
Despite how important in-person learning is for students and families, health and safety concerns and lack of trust has resulted in many parents not feeling comfortable sending their children back to school in-person. As parents committed to creating a better education system for ALL kids, not just our own, we want to partner with policymakers and take the lead on developing a vision that prioritizes health and safety and represents the needs of DC families.

OUR SOLUTION: Writing Our Own Vision for #DCSchoolsRecovery

We are a diverse group of 118 parent leaders who come from all Wards, races, and backgrounds who care deeply about our children and our city. This past April, we used our own experiences and the results of [PAVE's COVID-19 impact survey](#) to inform our vision for a family-centered response to coronavirus in DC and [#DCSchoolsRecovery](#). We were grateful to see so much progress around our goals, but our work is not done until every child has access to the support and education they deserve. **This fall, we came together to revise our vision to meet our current moment.**

OUR PROCESS

From September to December, we have met virtually over **23 times** to review [our work and progress from the spring](#) and examine the results of [PAVE's Parent Back to School Survey](#) as well as DC's existing response and recovery plans. During these meetings, we discussed our experiences, needs, and concerns and what we believe DC should do to best support families and communities. Together, we established a *new* vision for how DC should meet all families' basic needs, while improving distance learning and reopening schools in a safe and equitable way.



PART ONE: Meeting Families' Basic Needs

Coronavirus has persistently and pervasively impacted our city in a myriad of ways. While there is much to be done to prepare for the future, we must focus on the **immediate** needs of kids and families - especially for those who are furthest from opportunity and whose wellbeing, safety, and education are most at-risk. Only when these basic needs are met can children learn and grow. If the city does not meet the essential needs of children, the resulting stress and trauma will not just affect children's learning, but also their physical and mental health. We believe DC should focus on addressing the following areas to address these needs, with specific requests for each below:

- [Access to Food and Groceries](#)
- [Access to Resources \(Including Income, Housing, and Utility Support/Relief\)](#)
- [Access to Health Care and Child Care](#)



ACCESS TO FOOD AND GROCERIES

We know physical wellbeing is directly connected to how well kids can learn, and we know that children cannot achieve their full potential when they are hungry. Kids need healthy, nutritious meals, **and decades of studies have proven that without them, kids' academic achievement suffers** and they can suffer from **toxic stress, depression, anxiety, or a number of other health challenges**. The same is true for their families. In this city, no one should go hungry and have to put their health at risk because of lack of food.

WHAT PARENTS WANT TO SEE

- **All parents should have access to nutritious food and groceries without risking the health and safety of their families.**
 - All families should receive clear information about available options for accessing food and groceries.
 - Options for food pick-up should be equitably placed around the city to limit barriers to access.
 - All families should be able to access food at any school pick-up sites, rather than just those enrolled at the school, as this is especially important for low-income families with limited access to safe transportation or those with children who attend different schools and/or schools far from their home.
 - DC should continue to use existing resources and work with community partners to offer delivery to support families with exceptional needs when possible.
 - In accordance with DC Health guidance, the city should work with local community gardens and farmers market operators to provide families with fresh, local, and healthy food.
 - All pick-up sites and community centers should have clear guidance on sanitation and safety measures for families to follow and ensure that all frontline workers have access to Personal Protection Equipment (PPE).
 - Supplemental supports like Pandemic-Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) should be available for eligible families that have children who aren't able to receive food at school in-person. Funding should be consistent and timely throughout the pandemic, as many families rely on this program. Information about these programs should be easy to access and in multiple languages.

- **Food and grocery pick-up options should meet the diverse needs of communities.**
 - More food and grocery options should be made available to meet the dietary and cultural needs of communities (i.e. vegetarian, gluten- or dairy-free options, kosher meals, etc.).
 - When possible, relevant organizations and agencies should share recipes and resources to help parents learn to cook healthy meals for their families with the groceries provided.

WHAT DC SHOULD DO IN RESPONSE

In order for this to be true for all families in all wards and communities:

1. *DC Health should work with schools and community partners to ensure the needs of families are being met around food and groceries, including support and expansion of meal/grocery delivery for residents with exceptional needs, and providing additional dietary food options.*
2. *DC Health should continue and expand the work with schools and community partners to distribute informational materials on available resources, health and safety measures, cooking/nutrition guidance, and updates on available items as appropriate and ensure information is translated into multiple languages.*
3. *The Mayor and our federal representatives should continue to work with allies in other states to ensure the P-EBT is expanded and extended and the US Department of Agriculture extends the waiver that allows DC families to pick up meals from any school or LEA regardless of where their child is enrolled during the public health emergency. The pick up times for meals should be expanded to accommodate for parents' and students' schedules.*
4. *DC Health should ensure that all frontline workers - many of whom are parents - have access to PPE at all essential sites, especially those at grocery stores and other meal pick-up sites. They should also ensure that stores are vigilant about health and safety measures like social distancing in line, providing PPE for those that don't have it, and take steps to minimize customers' time in the stores like opening more lines.*



ACCESS TO RESOURCES

(Including Income, Housing, and Utility Support)

If we are going to effectively set students up for learning and success, we must consider the whole child and their environment. Having safe and secure housing and access to vital utilities and the internet are critical for students' ability to learn and thrive - especially as we navigate ongoing distance learning.

- Prior to Coronavirus, almost 7,500 students were homeless. As gentrification increases along with the cost of housing in the District, the number of students facing homelessness has been on the rise every year. Research shows that students that are facing homelessness are more likely to be below grade level, to be held back, and to have mental health issues.
- Now, as tens of thousands of DC parents must stay at home and/or are out of work and don't have access to income, housing, or necessary utilities, kids' ability to learn at home is at risk. If we move the classroom to kids' living rooms, we need to do all that we can to make sure families have what they need.

WHAT PARENTS WANT TO SEE

- **Access to - and information about - services, support, or relief benefits should be available to all DC residents.**
 - All residents should be able to receive support - regardless of documentation status.
 - The need for ongoing support and stimulus payments should be regularly assessed as the pandemic continues to make sure those who need it most can receive assistance.
 - College students who are over 18 years of age should also be eligible for financial support, as should children over 18 who are severely disabled and living at home.
 - DC should provide everyone with clear guidance around all available supports, including federal programs, stimulus payments, and mortgage and rental assistance/forgiveness programs.
 - Programs offering payment waivers, deferrals, freezes, or other supports should proactively reach out to families about their options and necessary action steps through multiple modes of communication (websites/email, social media, paper mail, phone calls, texts, etc.).

WHAT DC SHOULD DO IN RESPONSE

In order for this to be true for all families in all wards and communities:

1. *The Mayor and DC Council should allocate additional emergency funding to ensure all residents are able to access unemployment benefits and support during this time and create an equitable, fast process to distribute funding to families. This should include excluded workers like undocumented immigrants and those who have informal sources of income.*
2. *The Mayor and all appropriate agencies should ensure all families have access to information and guidance on what support/relief options are available, how to apply, and any rights and protections they are guaranteed, through a robust outreach effort using mailers, robocalls/texts, DC's Coronavirus website, and social media - all in multiple languages.*
3. *The Mayor and DC Council should create more funding for [mortgage and rent deferral](#) programs that allow for missed payments to be repaid over the next year after the public health emergency or provide direct financial coverage for those with the greatest needs, like [mortgage](#) and [rental](#) assistance and [rent forgiveness](#).*



ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE AND CHILD CARE

Nothing is more important than the health and safety of our children - from the womb, to birth, and beyond. It is absolutely essential that every family have access to health care and a safe place for their children to be while parents are working or away.

- **DC is a leader in the percentage of residents who have health insurance.** Still, as we face an unprecedented public health emergency, it is important that **we take bold steps to get *everyone* insured and connected to the care that they need.**
- **Not all communities have access to quality health care options close to where they live,** especially families in Ward 7 and 8, where there is only one hospital for over 160,000 residents.
- While DC has pioneered universal Pre-K to much success in its early years, there are still many families who do not have access to child care, especially for children under three.
- Access to quality, affordable, and consistent early childhood health programs and child care is important for the healthy development of children and for the economy, as it allows parents to work while knowing their children are safe and supported.
- Studies show that high quality early learning environments help **address the growing achievement gap between low-income children and their higher-income peers** and boosts income later in life - something we must make accessible to everyone in our city.

WHAT PARENTS WANT TO SEE

- **Child care is essential and therefore should be available for all essential workers.**
- **DC should make investments to stabilize child care providers now so they can continue to operate during and after the public health emergency.**
- **All families should have clear guidance about how to address medical needs during this time, including:**
 - How to sign up for insurance, including Medicaid.
 - When and how to access medical services that are not related to Coronavirus (regular check-ins and appointments, shifting to telehealth for diagnosis, treatment and prescription as needed, etc.).
 - How to recognize and respond to symptoms of Coronavirus.

- Information about available testing and health services in the event a family or community member shows symptoms of Coronavirus.
- Where and how to get required vaccines children need to attend school and when available, information about any upcoming Coronavirus vaccines.
- **Health care should be available and affordable for all residents - regardless of income level or documentation status.**
- **All parents should have access to necessary cleaning supplies to keep their families safe and healthy.**
 - Parents should have adequate supplies to sanitize their living environments, protect their families' health, and stop the spread of the virus. This includes sanitizer/disinfectant, wipes, paper towels, and soap.
 - Community partners and city agencies should support parents who do not have the means to buy supplies or the ability to travel safely to purchase them, especially those who may be facing homelessness and are living in shelters.

WHAT DC SHOULD DO IN RESPONSE

In order for this to be true for all families in all wards and communities:

1. *The Mayor and DC Council must enact a child care relief package that includes funding for:*
 - *Relief grants for licensed center and home-based child care providers serving young children under age 5.*
 - *Incentives for businesses offering child care to emergency and essential workers, including hazard pay, PPE, and cleaning supplies.*
2. *DC Health should work with all DCPS and public charter schools to communicate health care information to families, including how to sign up for insurance during the special enrollment period, how to sign up for Medicaid, and guidance around Coronavirus and testing as well as traditional medical requirements for schools.*
3. *DC should ensure that the DC Alliance program is easy for families to access, including the option to sign-up and renew online.*
4. *DC Health should work with DCPS, public charter schools, and community partners to provide supplemental cleaning supplies for families during work packet or food pick-up.*

Part Two: A Family-Centered Education System

Even before Coronavirus, our schools and our kids were struggling, with just over [one third of children performing on grade level, significantly growing opportunity gaps across race and socioeconomic status](#), and [almost half of kids having suffered from a traumatic experience](#). Early data, along with the stories of families, already demonstrate that **low-income communities and communities of color are suffering the most from Coronavirus**. We must ensure that DC centers equity in all plans to heal and recover from this pandemic and its impacts so that those communities - who are an essential part of our city's fabric - are truly supported in this time of significant need, and we are all able to see as a safer, stronger, and more just DC education system.

OUR WHY

We know that everyone will not return to in-person instruction in the next year, but we know our kids cannot wait that long for improvements and support. We also must address families' health and safety concerns and lack of trust in our education system. This will take time - so any plan for #DCSchoolsRecovery **must span beyond this school year**. With that in mind, we reimagined a plan - from **now to reopening** to our **new normal** - to give schools and families the support they need to ensure all kids have access to the education they need and deserve.

In coming together to develop our collective vision for what this reopening and recovery process for schools should look like, we grounded ourselves with the following core beliefs:

- The system we had BEFORE Coronavirus was **not working for all kids and families**. Therefore, our goal should not be to "get back to normal," but rather create a "new normal" that is centered in racial, economic, and social justice.
- **Families and communities have immense knowledge, power, and resiliency** that can - and should - be tapped into and cultivated.
- If we are to reimagine and redesign a system that really does better for each and every one of DC's residents, we must **connect with, listen to, and meaningfully engage communities** in all of our efforts moving forward. **This is the only way to rebuild trust and come together for our kids during a time they need us the most.**

With this foundation we have created a bold and comprehensive vision for a family-centered education system as we weather this storm together.

OUR SOLUTION

- [Strengthen distance learning](#)
- [Develop a safe and equitable plan to return to school in-person](#)

- [Invest in and strengthen systems that support kids and families](#)



STRENGTHEN DISTANCE LEARNING

We know that many kids will be learning remotely at least for some part of their schooling for the near future. We must ensure that students, teachers, and schools have the resources and support they need to make distance learning work better for kids and families.

WHAT PARENTS WANT TO SEE

Schools should meaningfully engage parents in distance learning.

- **Schools should work to build and deepen relationships with families in authentic and creative ways as we navigate this together. To do so, communication with families should be two-way, including:**
 - Personal calls/wellness check-ins from teachers and school staff.
 - Surveys to understand what families need and to get feedback on their experience.
 - Additional virtual opportunities for parents and students to engage in the school community.
- **Schools need to support parents and caregivers in understanding the expectations for schedules, online learning tools and platforms, lessons, grading policies, and any other school activities.**
 - This is especially important for families with high school students, who may have more flexible schedules or independence, meaning information doesn't always get to parents and families.
 - Schools should ensure that any virtual meetings or social media used during distance learning complies with relevant laws and regulations, including consent around recording and/or sharing content.
- **Schools should work collaboratively and leverage community relationships to connect with families that schools haven't been able to reach.**
 - Enrollment has dropped by around 500 students in both DCPS and public charter schools. It is imperative to reach those 500 students and ensure they are reconnected and re-engaged in their school community.
 - City leaders should look at what has been going well with distance learning and support schools with implementing those best practices. Examples could include practices from neighboring districts, the PCSB webinars, DCPS town halls, Flamboyan's wellness call script, charter schools

sharing ideas through First Fridays, and other online platforms that allow students to choose their own learning paths.

- **Schools should be realistic and honest about their plans and expectations.**
 - Parents and caregivers understand this is an unprecedented and challenging time for everyone and want to partner *with* schools. This requires direct and transparent communication about what schools are putting in place, the limitations and challenges, and any plans for the future.

All parents and families should have access to resources to help support their kids at home, including:

- **Mental health supports**
 - The education system should support schools in providing virtual access to social emotional learning programs, school staff trained in trauma-informed practices, and high-quality mental health professionals for *kids and families*.
 - Importantly, teachers and school staff should also have access to mental health supports and resources.
 - Families and communities should be partners in supporting mental wellness.
 - Schools should share resources with families in order to support kids' social emotional learning and development and overall mental health at home.
 - DC agencies and schools should build and maintain accessible central resource hubs to house information for families in one easy-to-use place.
 - This should include guidance/strategies to talk about COVID with kids, information about how to access mental health services over the phone/video chat, and ways to assess kids' mental health needs while at home and connect them to support, especially if this is their first time.
- **Resources to help support instruction and learning at home, including:**
 - Resources for parents/caregivers to learn the academic content so they can help teach it to kids, i.e. curriculum/study guides, answer sheets, etc.
 - Strategies on how to keep kids engaged/create structures or routines.
 - Learning supplies like paper, notebooks, markers, pencils, construction paper, books, etc.
 - Students with IEPs and 504s should still receive specialized instruction and supports - and parents should be empowered with resources and strategies to support their children's unique learning needs at home.
 - Schools need to provide resources, guidance, and support for parents who are not able to stay at home with their children and support their learning, especially parents who are essential or health care workers.
- **Technology and internet**

- Developmentally appropriate devices should be made available to all families - especially those who are most in need or have multiple children at home and may need additional devices. This is critical for both learning and to access telehealth appointments.
- Reliable, high-speed internet must be made accessible to all families (either free or low-cost), especially those East of the River.
- There should be a clear, equitable, and simple process for families to get additional devices or repair devices when needed. This process should be communicated through multiple channels to make sure families have access to the information.

WHAT DC SHOULD DO IN RESPONSE

In order for this to be true for all families in all wards and communities, DC must:

1. Provide Critical Supports for Children During Distance Learning

- *The Mayor and Council should allocate funding for mental health and other student support professionals providing in-person services, including hazard pay, adequate personal protection equipment (PPE), and cleaning supplies.*
- *The Mayor and Council, alongside the philanthropic and private business community, should make funding available to provide devices for all families that need them and make sure LEAs have maintenance plans to repair and replace devices as needed.*
- *The Mayor and Council, alongside the philanthropic and private business community, should make funding available to subsidize high-speed, reliable internet access for every family during the public health emergency.*
- *The Mayor and our federal representatives should push the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to increase the minimum download speeds for basic internet to levels that would adequately support reliable connections across multiple devices.*

2. Develop and Share Best Practices to Partner with Families and Communities

- *OSSE, DME, PCSB, and DCPS should work together to provide all school leaders with professional development, best practices, exemplar resources, and additional support to improve communication and engagement with families and support families with learning at home.*
- *The Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) should work with mental health providers and community partners to create and maintain a robust resource hub for schools and families to address these needs, work to make this hub accessible for everyone, and offer flexible options for kids and families to receive mental and behavioral health counseling and services.*
- *The Department of Behavioral Health, the Deputy Mayor of Education (DME), and OSSE should leverage federal guidance and work with school leaders and community providers to shift to telehealth, including guidance on mandated reporting, privacy requirements, and any other*

necessary protections and considerations. They should then communicate any decisions to schools and families so all are clear on their respective rights and expectations.



A SAFE AND EQUITABLE PLAN TO RETURN TO SCHOOL IN-PERSON

We know that kids need to go to school in-person so they can thrive academically, develop critical social emotional skills, and receive the support and services they need. Distance learning has been hard on all families, but the burden isn't shared equally.

Because white and affluent parents have greater access to quality in-person options for their children, many children have been able to stave off learning loss, and some children are making greater learning gains than before the pandemic because of robust, personalized support. Black, brown, and low-income children are bearing the brunt of this pandemic and distance learning. They are falling even more behind academically, not receiving support services, and disproportionately suffering from trauma including isolation, stress, and lack of basic needs.

Despite the high stakes, the city hasn't effectively engaged families and communities to make a strong plan for returning in-person that people trust. Only 16% of parents in PAVE's September 2020 survey said they would feel comfortable sending their children back to school in-person, largely because of health concerns and deep distrust of the system to keep their kids safe. We know that it IS possible to reopen safely, but it will require robust engagement, guidance, and resources. This work will take time, and it could be as many as three years until we return to "normal". Our kids can't wait that long for improvements so we put together our own plan for safely and equitably reopening schools that is grounded in our communities' needs.

WHAT PARENTS WANT TO SEE

Engage key stakeholders in planning:

- **System leaders should leverage existing structures (e.g. advisory councils, public charter school boards, or other bodies at LEAs that include parents, teachers, and school staff) in order to:**
 - Inform the plan to engage students, parents, teachers, and school staff, including surveys, feedback sessions, town halls, etc. These opportunities should be intentional and equitable to

meet parents where they are and in the languages they speak and should include a diversity of methods and times for parents to engage.

- Inform school staffing decisions around returning to school in-person, taking into account teachers' family and medical needs.
- Discuss and analyze what they heard from each stakeholder group in the school community to collectively determine action steps and inform the reopening plan.
- Share with families how their feedback has been incorporated in the reopening plan.
- **These structures should be sure to:**
 - Actively work to engage parents and community members who are often left out of the conversation.
 - Designate a point staff person to lead the planning around reopening.
 - Designate a family liaison to communicate about reopening plans and bring in experts to share directly when appropriate, i.e. nurses, special education coordinators, academic leads, etc.
 - Ensure the auditing team includes parents to confirm health and safety guidelines are being followed.
 - Allow administrators and teachers to talk honestly and openly about what they need without being penalized.
 - Ensure planning and decisions are transparent and clearly communicated to the school community in a timely manner.
 - Reevaluate the effectiveness of the plan throughout the school year and make improvements as necessary.
 - Coordinate with nurses, custodians, special education coordinators and staff, mental health professionals, as well as community partners including, but not limited to Out of School Time providers, WMATA, community organizations, healthcare providers, and childcare providers.

Develop comprehensive guidance for health and safety:

- **System leaders should build off of the guidance from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and Department of Health (DOH) as well as other successful models to establish developmentally appropriate health and safety guidance to support schools with reopening, which should include but is not limited to:**
 - **COVID-19 testing procedures**
 - Comprehensive guidance and necessary resources for testing students and staff prior to returning to school in-person.
 - Comprehensive guidance and necessary resources to conduct randomized COVID-19 testing until the end of the public health emergency.
 - A clear reporting system to share the numbers of tests given and the number of students and staff who test positive.

- **Entry and exit procedures**
 - Limit in-person access to school buildings to essential staff and students.
 - Screening should occur daily when entering school, including temperature checks and checking for other symptoms according to health guidance.
 - Offer guidance for planning staggered entry and exit times to accommodate parents with more than one child or various transportation methods.
- **Cleaning and social distancing procedures**
 - Have a clear process and schedule for handwashing and sanitation.
 - Ensure all HVAC systems are up-to-date and working properly.
 - Create an adequate and effective custodian-to-student ratio.
 - In particular, there should be clear plans for common spaces like hallways, bathrooms, the cafeteria, etc.
- **Developing and sharing scenario maps for each possible occurrence:**
 - What happens and what is the protocol if a teacher has been exposed? A student?
 - What happens and what is the protocol if a teacher shows symptoms at school? A student?
 - What happens and what is the protocol if a teacher shows symptoms outside of the school building? A student?
 - What happens and what is the protocol if a teacher tests positive? A student?
- **Safe transportation**
 - System and LEA leaders should work with WMATA and other necessary partners to create guidance for safe transportation for students, especially those that take the bus or metro.

Build community trust in the plan:

- **System leaders should clearly communicate the health and safety guidance and support schools to share evidence that it is being implemented with fidelity in order to build trust with educators, families, and communities. This should include, but isn't limited to:**
 - **Increasing transparency and centering equity:**
 - Budgets should be transparent and clearly indicate how schools are spending their funding, especially expenses for the necessary cleaning/safety supplies and resources.
 - Funds must be equitably distributed to ensure older schools and schools East of the River are updated with urgency, and able to comply with new health and safety standards.
 - **Sharing evidence of adherence to guidance:**

- Recording and sharing videos and pictures of changes in school to demonstrate social distancing measures in classrooms, updated HVAC systems, supplies, etc.
- Offer socially distant and staggered walkthrough times ahead of the return to school in-person so parents can see the health and safety measures.
- Share cleaning logs and monthly inventory of necessary supplies (i.e. hand sanitizer, masks, gloves, cleaning wipes, etc.).
- **Creating systems for ongoing evaluation and accountability:**
 - Schools should be regularly and randomly evaluated by a quality assurance team on whether they are following guidance around health and safety protocols, keeping up with necessary facility requirements, and maintaining adequate cleaning and sanitation supplies.
 - When possible, this team should include parents from the above mentioned reopening committee at each LEA or other parent leaders. Only those willing and able to pass strict health requirements should be allowed to participate to ensure the health and safety of all parties.

Communication:

- **System leaders need to collaborate and support LEAs to communicate with families about reopening.**
 - **System leaders should provide a uniform template for weekly school- or site-level briefings to ensure every family is receiving the same amount of information. This should include, but is not limited to:**
 - COVID rates at the school, broken down by subgroup when possible (staff, students, etc.).
 - Students served in-person and virtually.
 - Number of tests administered.
 - Number of positive tests.
 - Comparison of positivity rates to critical threshold levels that would require a change, and what the next steps would be if rates exceed that threshold.
 - A review of the results of the evaluation and accountability processes listed and any further action steps or updates to plans.
 - When possible, available resources to support families with health care or child care in the event their child is sick or isn't able to attend school because of quarantine requirements or school closures - especially on short notice.
 - **Share information in a timely and accessible way.**
 - Updates should be given as soon as possible if certain students or staff would need to quarantine or that a whole school would need to close due to exposure risk or transmission rates.

- Regularly share information about required vaccines and send updates on COVID vaccines availability for parents and children.
- Increase accessibility of communication, i.e. using simple and clear language, including infographics and visuals, translating into multiple languages, using a diversity of communication channels, etc.
- **Creating engaging ways to teach health guidance to the school community.**
 - Bring together teachers and health experts to develop a “train-the-trainer” model for teaching health and safety guidance that is developmentally appropriate and grounded in trauma-informed, culturally relevant, and restorative practices.
 - Share lessons and resources with students and parents about health and safety guidelines.

WHAT DC SHOULD DO IN RESPONSE

In order for this to be true for all families in all wards and communities, DC must:

1. Provide guidance and resources for LEAs to develop a safe and community-driven reopening plan.

- *The DME should work with PCSB, DCPS, DOH, OSSE, DBH, WMATA and other related agencies to develop robust guidance for LEAs about health and safety protocols for reopening, including but not limited to testing, entering and exiting the building, cleaning and social distancing, and transportation.*
- *The Mayor and DOH should also work closely with LEAs to inform weekly school- and site-level briefings for parents and ways to teach health and safety guidance to school communities in a developmentally appropriate and engaging way.*
- *The DME should convene LEA leaders to share guidance for LEAs, best practices for implementation of the guidance, turnkey resources and structures for planning and communication, and additional support to improve engagement and communication around reopening plans.*

2. Fund essential resources for health and safety plans.

- *The Mayor and DC Council should provide LEAs with the necessary funding to buy essential resources to implement their health and safety plans, including testing, cleaning and sanitation supplies, building changes to support social distancing, etc.*

3. Build community trust with consistent transparency and oversight.

- *The DME should create and publish a detailed citywide plan for updating school facilities to meet health and safety requirements. This plan should prioritize schools that have been underserved and need modernization the most, especially those East of the River.*

- *The DME should provide LEAs with guidance and resources on how to transparently and consistently share evidence that all health and safety plans are being followed with fidelity, including but not limited to the results of the third party and random evaluations, adequate spending on cleaning supplies, investments in and installation of social distancing measures, updated ventilation systems, and cleaning protocols.*
- *The DME, DOH, DCPS, and PCSB should work together to create a quality assurance team that will randomly evaluate schools' adherence to health and safety guidance and publicly share the results of their findings.*
- *The DME and OSSE should work with DCPS, PCSB, and public charter LEAs to ensure they are transparent about how they spend their funding, especially around health and safety supplies and resources. OSSE should continue the work to develop common financial reporting standards and a uniform budget framework for all schools and ensure parent voice is included in that process.*



INVEST IN AND STRENGTHEN SYSTEMS THAT SUPPORT KIDS AND FAMILIES

Our schools are central hubs in our communities and are being asked to do more than ever for kids and families. As we look to schools to support students and families throughout the pandemic - whether they are learning at home or in-person - there are some things that ALL schools need.

- Schools need resources and guidance on how to best engage families around school culture, mental health supports, social emotional learning, academic supports and meeting students where they are, as well as health and safety protocols.
- Black, brown, and low-income students are disproportionately falling behind during the pandemic - so we must plan to center these students and ensure they're receiving equitable support.
- Schools will need to address the trauma that students and staff have faced before and during the pandemic, and must be provided resources for trauma-informed training, access to mental health professionals, and strong, culturally-responsive social emotional learning curriculum.

Child care providers and out of school time programs are also critical to building a family-centered education system. To do this crucial work, all need robust support and investments from the city.

WHAT PARENTS WANT TO SEE

Building Relationships with Families

ALL schools should have clear, consistent, and open communication with families and actively work to ensure information and support reaches ALL families.

- **To lessen the burden on families with multiple children in multiple schools/sectors, education system updates and guidance for parents from the Deputy Mayor of Education (DME) should be consistent across DCPS and public charter schools.**
 - Cross-sector coordination is critical to this effort, as families navigate the many changes.
 - The DME should support schools in providing information about resources and supports available (food locations, unemployment services, health and child care updates, etc.) to families.

- This should be done using multiple methods of communication - and in multiple languages - in order to reach all families.

The DME should also convene LEAs and provide support and guidance to schools around family engagement and how to build relationships and trust.

- **The city should provide schools with the resources and support to connect with families and build trust.**
 - Allow teachers and school staff to **individually reach out to every family.**
 - These conversations and interactions should not be focused on academics, but can include it.
 - The goal should be to connect with each student and their family, understand how they are doing and how they've been impacted by Coronavirus, and find areas of common ground or interest in order to build trust and understanding across identities.
 - Provide resources for schools to host events that safely bring **everyone - teachers, leaders, parents, students, and partners - in the school community together.**
 - This should be an opportunity for all members of the school community to reconnect, i.e. kids, parents, teachers, administrators, custodians, bus drivers, coaches, etc.
 - School staff should use what they know about their school community to plan events that will bring different groups together, in safe numbers outside or virtually.
 - Schools should be able to share best practices with each other by grade band, Ward, or community.

Reimagining School Culture with Families

OSSE's Health and Wellness team should provide support and guidance to schools to redesign their school culture.

- **School leaders should have resources and support to work with their staff, parents, and students to reimagine what school culture and environment should look like.**
 - For in-person options, the physical space at school should be clean, inviting, and bright to make students excited to come back and learn.
 - Schools should engage staff, families, and students to develop their vision for virtual learning and what makes them feel welcomed, safe, and ready to learn.
 - School leaders and staff should have access to professional development, communities of practice, and other learning opportunities to help them further develop, and continue to refine, a welcoming, caring, and trauma-informed mindset and culture for their school for both in-person and virtual settings. This should be demonstrated in the language used, the policies put in place, through increased staff visibility and accessibility, and the communication and interaction with every member of the school community.

- All existing school policies and procedures should be revisited with this trauma-informed lens, especially discipline policies.
 - Especially for in-person options, students and their families will have been away from school buildings for a long time. They will need restorative practices, support, and grace as they work to relearn and/or adjust to expectations and structures.

Prioritizing the Mental Health Needs of Families - Parents, Children, Grandparents, and Caregivers

The Mayor should ensure that all schools have mental health teams and resources to support students while distance learning and when they return to in-person instruction.

- **Schools need support to continue to check-in on, connect with, and find support for kids and their families.**
 - Schools can include simple and safe ways to assess how students and families are doing (surveys, intermittent temperature/pulse checks, etc.) and ACEs screening in coordination with mental health professionals.
 - Social emotional learning and trauma-informed practices should be embedded into all aspects of the school day - and mental health professionals should be available for kids with greater needs.
- **School staff should receive professional development, tools, and resources so they can reimagine, expand, and deepen the ways in which they engage with families throughout the year.**
 - Professional development can include how schools communicate to families, how they get information or input from them, how parents are engaged in students' learning, how families are engaged in mental health supports, etc.
- **Schools should receive guidance on how to balance students' mental health needs and academic instruction during distance and in-person learning.**
 - **This can include:**
 - How to incorporate social emotional learning into all lessons and best practices around building a supportive school culture to set students up for success.
 - How to best support teachers and staff with their mental health, as they have also experienced trauma and will need support as they navigate many competing priorities and challenges.
 - Ways to incorporate Out of School Time (OST) programs in planning for both social and emotional development and academic growth.
 - Considerations for shifting to extended school schedules, especially around ways to incorporate breaks for students and staff to avoid burnout and how this can be informed by input from parents.

- How to support students who may have lost parents or guardians. This should include both how to connect them to necessary support services and how staff can support their mental health at home.

Planning to Meet Students Where They Are in Their Learning

OSSE and the State Board of Education (SBOE) should ensure all schools have the resources and support they need to assess where students are and adjust their planning - early and often.

- **The city should support schools with:**
 - **Access to evidence-based and standard-aligned assessments to quickly assess what skills and standards students have mastered and where they still need to grow.**
 - Schools should be provided with guidance on how to administer these assessments virtually as well as in potentially unfamiliar in-person learning environments if necessary.
 - Assessments should inform data-driven instruction, targeted interventions, and conversations with parents so that parents can also continue to support learning.
 - The city should streamline processes like competency-based learning waivers for high school students that allow them to demonstrate their abilities outside of the classroom or “seat-time” that supports their promotion to the next grade.
 - **Professional development, guidance, and resources to continuously adjust instruction.**
 - Math skills should be prioritized during interventions, as we know that math skills will take the hardest hit without formal instruction time and all skills build on one another. This necessity is explained further in EmpowerK12’s report: [COVID-19 on DC Student Achievement](#).
 - The city should be sure to provide robust professional development on:
 - How to differentiate instruction and personalize lesson plans to support students where they are to help them make the gains they need.
 - How to utilize educational technology to personalize and improve instruction and how to build on what worked well with distance learning during school closures.
 - How to include new and creative approaches into teaching and learning.
 - Retention should be considered only in extreme or extraordinary circumstances.
 - **Centering students with disabilities who are most at-risk of learning loss and falling behind their peers.**
 - **System leaders should provide professional development and resources to schools to support students with disabilities.**
 - Because many students will not have received all of the services they needed during distance learning and/or their IEP is out of compliance, schools should

create an organized plan to have a meeting for every student with an IEP over the next year, prioritizing those that had reviews expire.

- OSSE should provide special education coordinators with professional development on how to best ensure compliance, promote the quality of all IEPs and supports provided, and engage with families.
- **Expand special education resources and support.**
 - Schools should receive guidance to offer parent and student orientations to special education services to help them understand the evaluation process results, their IEP, service delivery, and manage the emotional experiences related to the transition into special education.
 - Provide and clearly communicate about citywide remote and in-person training to families to help them understand their child’s diagnosis and services, strategies for supporting them at home, and ways to cope with their disability and promote family wellness.
 - Provide information about and easy access to a special education advocate who can help a parent navigate the system, obtain resources, and comfortably express their needs and concerns.
 - Develop an online family portal that allows parents to easily access student records, IEP documents, and other important information. This portal should also allow parents to track communications, service delivery, and important dates.

Partnering with Families as the Year Continues

The DME should convene LEAs with the specific purpose of providing ongoing support and guidance to schools around engaging and communicating with families.

This can include:

- **How to continue to engage families and communities in a meaningful, authentic, and proactive way, especially in a world where there are continuous closures until a vaccine is identified.**
 - As mentioned above, staff should continuously reach out to kids and families to understand how they are doing, what is working, what isn’t, and what support may be needed.
 - Schools should communicate with parents what they learned from relationship-building conversations over the summer and throughout the year, how they incorporated the insights and feedback from those conversations and adjusted their practice, and how they want to continue to engage parents in the work moving forward - whether that is in school or during additional periods of distance learning.
- **Support on how to continuously reevaluate, adjust, and communicate their plans.**

- There are still many unknowns and uncertainties in the days, months, and years ahead. We don't know when we will be able to go back to school or if/when there will be future closures. Schools need to be prepared to reevaluate, adjust, and pivot their plans quickly and know how to effectively communicate - and get input on - those shifts and changes.
- In order to do so, schools must be adequately resourced, i.e. enough staff capacity, additional professional development and planning time, and other necessary infrastructure like communication systems, translation support, etc.
- **Including parents as partners in improving special education supports**
 - Create and moderate parent-to-parent peer support groups so parents can better support their kids.
 - Ensure effective systems are in place for parents and the IEP Team to work together as equal partners to build a clear adult pathway for secondary education, independent living, post-secondary education (i.e. understanding Diploma versus Special Education Certificate), and supportive employment.
 - Include parents in the design and delivery of professional development and evaluation process for teachers around how to serve students with disabilities and their families.
 - Partner with parents to develop a flexible and resilient strategy for delivering services while learning at home, i.e. schedules, learning platforms, documentation, etc.

Ensuring Families are Supported Outside of School

The Mayor should ensure that supports for parents and families are available and flexible as we navigate the uncertain challenges and schedules ahead.

- As the public health crisis continues, schools will need to be especially vigilant about safety at school. This means when students are sick, parents will need to pick them up and keep them home, possibly for extended periods of time. This will especially impact children with pre-existing medical conditions.
- The need for self-quarantining and the possible continued school and business closures will undoubtedly impact parents' ability to work, especially hourly workers or those who cannot work from home.
- DC should look to provide flexible supports for parents when possible so those with less means or little job flexibility can still have safe, secure child care for all of their kids.

Centering Racial and Social Justice

The Mayor and DC Council should ensure that racial and social justice is centered in all decisions and lives out a commitment to equity in practice.

- For all budget and planning decisions, DC should ensure the REACH Act is implemented with fidelity and transparently share their assessment of the impact on communities of color .
- This work should inform the development of systems and policies to end socioeconomic disparities across the District, including income, education, access to food, healthcare, housing, and the criminal justice system.
- People of color, their communities, schools, and related support systems should be prioritized in all plans for recovery.

WHAT DC SHOULD DO TO SUPPORT SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES

The city should take urgent steps this year to:

1. **Make Bold Investments in Our Kids and Our Education System:**

- **Fully fund the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula to the recommended adequacy level** based on the 2013 adequacy study (until the forthcoming DME study is available). The 2013 study said the base UPSFF should be \$11,638 (when adjusted for inflation). [The UPSFF is currently set at \\$11,310](#) which is a gap of nearly \$328 per student.
- **Fully fund the at-risk weight in the UPSFF to the recommended adequacy level** based on the 2013 adequacy study (until the forthcoming DME study is available). The 2013 study said the at-risk weight should be 0.37, or \$4,062 per student. The at-risk weight is currently set at 0.2256, or \$2,551 per student, which is a [gap of \\$1,511 per student](#).
 - We should also look to rename this measure so that we are not using deficit-based language and redefine the criteria to be more inclusive of families in need.
- **Urgently ensure schools have access to mental health professionals** - especially those that support our students with the greatest needs.
 - Estimated cost to fund the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) school-based mental health expansion: \$6.4 million to expand to 80 more schools.
 - Reverse the \$4 million cuts to community-based providers from FY21, especially the \$2 million that is matched with a federal multiplier of three which would add an additional \$6 million.
- **Ensure all schools have the resources they need to provide high-quality, culturally-affirming and responsive, and evidence-based social emotional learning programs as well as trauma-informed training and restorative practices for all staff at each school.**
 - Estimated total cost for K-12: \$10.8 million (\$45,000 per school x 236 schools)
- **Protect funding for Out of School Time Programs** so students can continue to access these essential enrichment activities.
- **Stabilize and expand funding for subsidies for child care providers, early childhood health programs, and pay for child care workers.**

As we continue to do this work, we should also work to:

2. Improve Cross-Sector Coordination and Communication

- *The DME should provide consistent education system updates and guidance for parents across DCPS and public charter schools.*
 - *So as not to overwhelm parents every week, these updates should be saved for important, substantive information that is clear, concise, and actionable (i.e. important date changes, opportunities to engage, or sharing resources).*
- *A robust communication system should be put in place that utilizes multiple methods of informing families about system updates and ways to access resources and support. Methods should include robocalls/texts, mailers, emails, social media posts, etc. and be translated into multiple languages.*

3. Develop and Share Best Practices around Partnering with Families and Communities

- *The DME should direct the appropriate education agency/ies to develop a standard of best practices on how to consistently and meaningfully engage parents, families, and communities in the development of the school culture and the implementation of mental health supports.*
- *Since these best practices should improve the work of schools, rather than cause undue burden or distractions from educating students, it is essential that this work be done in partnership with schools.*
- *These evidence-based best practices should include:*
 - *Working with school leadership, instructional staff, mental health staff, behavioral support staff, and relevant medical staff (i.e. nurse, speech pathologist).*
 - *Engaging all stakeholders in conversations about mental health supports, services, and staff professional development.*

4. Take Steps to Increase Equity, Accountability, and Sustainability in School Based Mental Health Supports

- ***Produce and Share a School Mental Health Landscape Analysis***
 - *The city should ensure that a comprehensive resource map of what mental health supports currently exist in each school and corresponding gap analysis is put together and made public to help create a comprehensive and long-term plan for the future.*
 - *These findings should be used to hold our city accountable for providing adequate supports as well as inform the allocation of funding mental health supports across schools and agencies, through a variety of opportunities beyond solely competitive grant application processes for schools.*
- ***Improve Coordination of Services and Care***

- *This work should especially prioritize recruitment and retention of mental health professionals that look like and come from the communities they will serve.*
- *To ensure mental health professionals are able to work in our schools, the city should:*
 - *Work to ensure qualifications and requirements between partners, city agencies, and schools are aligned in the best interests of kids and families.*
 - *Open opportunities through increased partnership with neighboring jurisdictions.*

APPENDIX

Appendix A

[Spring Coronavirus Parent Impact Survey Results](#)

Appendix B

[Fall Back to School Survey Results](#)