



**Testimony for the Public Roundtable on**  
***Student Learning Loss:***  
***Widening the Achievement Gap During the COVID-19 Pandemic***

**February 10, 2021**

**Submitted by**

**E.L. Haynes Public Charter School**  
**To**  
**Council Chairman Phil Mendelson**

Chairman Mendelson, thank you for the opportunity to participate in this discussion on the effect the COVID-19 pandemic has had on our students' learning and its impact on our community. We especially appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on what we've learned this year and on our planning process for the remainder of the school year, this summer, and for next school year. E.L. Haynes serves 1,190 students in Pre-K through 12th grade, and while our campuses are in Wards 1 and 4, our students represent all 8 wards. We are tremendously proud of the work we have done in this difficult time -- how we engage all of our students in virtual learning, how we support our staff and our families through an unprecedented school year, and how we leverage our time and our calendar.

### **Our Transition to Virtual Learning**

In March 2020, like many of our colleagues around the city and country, we transitioned to "home learning." Using a combination of packets, YouTube videos, Instagram, and one-on-one meetings, our instructional staff creatively worked with our students to close out the 2019-2020 School Year. That summer, we transitioned quickly -- making the decision to move to a 1:1 technology model -- purchasing computers for every student and hotspots for students who need them, and launching a new online learning management system. Besides investing in the hardware and software to ensure a successful learning experience, we provided professional development for our staff, technology support for our students and families, and significantly increased the size of our tech support team.

This plan came with significant investment -- more than \$700,000 to ensure that 100% of E.L. Haynes students have access to a device and hot spots (as needed), as well new platforms to support virtual instruction. This was in addition to the more than \$70,000 we spent providing each student all the educational materials they need to succeed at home -- including pencils, paper, workbooks, books, calculators.

We are proud of the virtual learning program that we developed. We believe we provide one of the best virtual programs in the city, and this is because of our teachers. They adapted quickly and continue to focus on how to build new skills to effectively teach in virtual classrooms. And they focus on connection and relationships with our students and families. Their hard work and creativity, and the support of our campus leadership and staff, enabled many successes this year. While important, the computers and hotspots are near meaningless without the caring, thoughtful, adults supporting our students each and every day.

This belief is supported by our January 2021 survey of families and students. Our families continue to indicate high satisfaction with our virtual program (78%). This level of satisfaction can be directly related to 96% of families and 86% of students saying that

they have the tech, tools, and resources needed to be (or to support) a successful learner. Further, 92% of families said they feel confident supporting their student's use of technology for learning.

### **COVID-19 and Its Impact on Our Students' Learning**

Across the country, there are multiple sources saying that students are experiencing learning loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic. E.L. Haynes' data paints a much more complicated picture. In order to best understand the impact the building closures and our subsequent transition to virtual learning has had on our students, we draw on a variety of data: our students' performance in class and on formal assessments, attendance, assignment completion, and through teacher observations.

Overall, we've seen increases in some of our assessment results across grades, but we believe our data is mixed or unreliable. For instance, fewer students took the Achievement Network (ANET) at every grade level, meaning our results could skew higher because based on historic trends, the students who did not complete the assessment are also some of our students who have struggled with formal assessments while in-person or are disengaged in virtual learning. Further, we saw improvements in some grades and subgroups, but decreases in others. Given how complicated interpreting these results are, we need to include other data in our analysis.

In the absence of reliable diagnostic data, teacher expertise and observations are even more important. A teacher's ongoing review of student work and their progress on grade-level standards, and their assessment of a students' social-emotional needs provide a deeper analysis into student performance.

How we engage parents in their students' academic program is also critical to student success. To this point, we have seen very positive outcomes -- 84% of high school, and 76% of middle school students have had a parent or guardian participate in at least two progress meetings this year to discuss how their child is doing.

Because of what we learned in our virtual classrooms, we cannot say for certain that all or even most of our students have experienced learning loss to the extent that others report. But, what we do know is that classrooms are more than just places where students master complex equations or learn to read, they are for play, social interaction, and other social-emotional development. And, while we believe that our virtual classrooms are meeting the academic needs of our students, we also believe that providing access to robust in-person opportunities will be critical to the long term emotional and physical wellbeing of our students.

### **Shifts in Our High School Schedule Drive Student Engagement and Achievement**

E.L. Haynes works hard to engage our high school students through a combination of

in-person experiences and a strategically designed course schedule.

At the beginning of the school year, we reimagined our high school student schedules to better engage them and encourage success. We shifted to a block schedule to focus on four core classes each semester, instead of the normal seven daily classes. This enabled students to focus on a smaller number of courses each semester. We also intentionally adjusted our daily schedule, making two important changes: we added a second daily advisory period, and we host daily office hours. The additional advisory period allows students to have another opportunity to connect with their peers and their advisor, and supports students to stay on track in real time. Office hours provide a space for students to receive individualized or small group instruction.

We currently offer limited in-person programming for high school students, where they are piloting our LIONS classrooms, which are our equivalent to a DCPS CARES classroom. We also host some 9th grade advisory days for priority students.

As we reflect on our high school students' data, we also see some mixed results. We look at which students in each grade level are on-track to graduate (passing courses and meeting other graduation milestones). Our seniors are ahead of last year's seniors at this point in the school year (86% for this year's seniors vs. 80% at this same time last year). On the other hand, our 9th graders are less on track than 9th graders were at this same time last year (78% vs. 88%).

We are using this to plan for what our students need. As I mentioned previously, this is why we will continue to host some 9th grade advisory days for priority students. We will also use our summer to support students who are off-track. Each summer we provide credit recovery programming for students in all grade levels. We are also planning for what a 9th to 10th grade summer bridge program could offer our students. We have not yet met many of our current 9th graders in person, and we believe we could foster relationships as well as support them in passing their 9th grade courses and enter their 10th grade year on track.

Overall, we do not have evidence of wide-spread learning loss at our high school, but we do have evidence that some of our lower-performing students are struggling in the virtual learning environment. There could also be unmeasured losses across all of our campuses in areas where we aren't collecting data, specifically science, social studies, extracurriculars, and social-emotional development.

### **Summer Programming and Our Extended-Year Calendar Will Be a Critical Tool**

E.L. Haynes was founded as the first year-round school in Washington, DC and has, since 2004, leveraged some form of an extended-year calendar. We do this by starting earlier in August, using breaks and intersession programming throughout the school

year, and then hosting three weeks of intersession over the summer.

In early January, we decided to align with DC Public Schools' start date for the 2021-2022 School Year (August 31, 2021) in anticipation of another unique school year, and to ensure we have equitable access to the city-wide resources that will support re-opening for our city's largest LEA. Because of this decision, we will modify our normal extended year model for the next school year (the second year in a row we've made this decision).

We see the use of our calendar and time as an important way to support our students' learning and to help address the gaps we see in our data -- which students need additional support, when, and how. Further, our intersession programming provides an opportunity for students to participate in enrichment activities, build relationships with other students, and explore topics from robotics and coding to art and dance, and more. This is why we are committed to offering three weeks of programming this summer, extended learning time next year, and planning to return to our extended-year calendar in 2022-2023.

### **Our Community and Their Input Will Drive Our Academic Quarter 4 Plans**

In mid-January, E.L. Haynes announced that we would begin planning for a hybrid model -- a mix of in-person and virtual learning -- beginning April 19, at the start of Academic Quarter 4, for the remainder of this school year. E.L. Haynes is committed to planning for what is possible to stand-up a hybrid model at each campus in order to provide more in-person opportunities for students and families.

Our goal in this planning process is to be as inclusive as possible, welcoming diverse perspectives to the table as we explore what is best for our entire community.

The diverse voices of our community are key to our decision-making process. We will collect feedback from our stakeholders through multiple ways -- surveys, family and staff forums, and campus-based working groups. These groups will talk through multiple options, discuss trade offs, review data on what our students need, and consider student, family, and staff perspectives. They will make recommendations, and E.L. Haynes leadership will announce a final decision by March 19.

As many in this room know, planning for a hybrid learning model is challenging. We need to balance the wishes and needs of families and students, the capacity of our staff, all while considering the equity issues at the center of each of these decisions. And, we believe that in-person opportunities are critical for our students.

### **How We Could Use the City's Support**

E.L. Haynes would like to thank the DC Council and the Mayor for their ongoing support

of schools in this very difficult time. Recovering from the impact and trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic will take years. We believe that with timely access to the vaccine and consistent and sustained investments to the UPSFF and the Facilities Allotment it will help ensure that schools can best support all students this year, next year, and into the future.

**Timely access to the vaccine.** Thank you to Mayor Bowser for making the vaccine available to our staff who support our limited in-person experiences, and thank you to the DC Alliance for supporting its distribution among charter schools. But, in order for us to reopen safely, our staff would need timely access to the vaccine, and a clear timeline for when it will be available to our entire staff community.

**Consistent and sustained investments to the UPSFF and Facilities Allotment.**

In addition to our investment in technology infrastructure to support virtual learning, we have also invested extensively in preparing our buildings and facilities for our return to in-person learning. We are not alone in these significant expenditures this year. Though we have had access to federal government support in these difficult times, these immediate and short term infusions of resources do not help us plan for the long-term work that will be necessary to support our students as we all recover in the years to come. It would be our hope that the Council would continue to support charter schools through a 4% increase to the UPSFF and a 2% increase to the facilities allotment. This ongoing support will help schools plan more effectively as well as make the investments necessary to support students in the long term.