

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF DEPUTY MAYOR FOR EDUCATION**



Public Roundtable
on
“School Reopening and Academic Recovery: Government Witness Testimony”

Testimony of
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Before the
Council of the District of Columbia
Committee of the Whole
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman

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Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. My name is Paul Kihn and I am the Deputy Mayor for Education. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

As a city, we are at an important inflection point in the pandemic. Our residents and neighbors are getting vaccinated, and our city is reopening after making tremendous sacrifices during this pandemic to keep our communities safe. It is a time to remember what we have lost. For so many, it has been the loss of loved ones. It has been the loss of employment and the means to provide for their family. For our students, it has been the loss of sixteen months of in-person learning and the vital connections that define childhood.

While we have experienced painful loss, we have also seen everyday heroes step up. Health care and other essential workers who have kept our critical services going. Child care workers and K12 educators who have innovated new ways to inspire and nurture our students. Teachers at all levels and in all sectors have sustained us, and I know every family has come to appreciate their indelible role.

Now, as we continue to meet this unprecedented moment head-on, it is time to accelerate our recovery efforts. We must continue to work closely together as a city. We must act with urgency, and we must take bold action. For almost a year, my office has been working with residents and leaders across the city to develop a comprehensive recovery plan, one that serves to mitigate any lasting harm to our children and bridge the fault lines of inequality. I am proud that we have developed our recovery plan in consultation with families, students, teachers, school leaders, and community members through listening sessions, community meetings, and other forums. Listening is at the heart of partnership – their voices have informed our plans to date and will continue to drive the decisions and any needed adjustments going forward.

We must also keep following the path of experts and evidence. A recovery plan of this scale and complexity must use proven solutions, tailored to the unique needs faced by our residents. We have spent hundreds of hours in conversation with local and national experts and reading the

research. I am pleased, now, to share some of the results of our deep listening, studious research, and careful, collaborative planning.

The centerpiece of our recovery efforts focuses on **school reopening**. Getting students back into the classroom for full-time, in-person instruction is the most important step we can take to accelerate learning. With increased vaccine availability, decreased community spread, and the precautions we have in place, it is safe for us to fully reopen schools. DC Health and OSSE have developed strong health and safety guidance and are offering ongoing technical assistance to our schools so they can create thoughtful, campus-specific plans. We are working closely with community partners to promote vaccinations for youth aged 12 and up, and their families, and to provide critical information to those who are hesitant. For example, we will soon launch vaccination drop-in sites at DCPS schools, and we will be working with Charters to serve as vaccination clinics through the DC Health Vaccine Exchange. We will also continue to offer a robust asymptomatic testing program to our schools to quickly detect and respond to positive COVID cases. A commitment to ensuring the safety of our students, teachers, and families is foundational to all our academic acceleration work.

With our commitment to full time in-person learning, we must **re-engage our students** and renew our focus on **daily attendance and safe travel** to and from school. For the upcoming school year, we are expanding our student outreach hub, staffed by CFSA experts, to support schools' efforts to re-engage students who have disengaged. Through DC For Hire Vehicles, we will also provide dedicated micro-transit shuttles from Ward 7 and 8 schools in our Safe Passage zones, and a comprehensive "Man the Block" program, putting caring adults on the routes to and from school as well as afterschool mediation.

To accelerate learning, we must **expand access to extended learning opportunities** and flood the city with **high-impact tutoring**, which is the most effective academic intervention. When schools employ these two strategies and staff them with high-quality educators, the results are dynamic. Our extended access includes, as we have shared before, introducing innovative approaches to summer learning, taking advantage of new Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) "boost camps," and offering opportunities through the Summer Youth Employment

Program that couples learning with internships. Our sustained investment in high-impact tutoring provides students with targeted 1:1 or very small group coaching on the skills they need to access and master grade level content and get ahead. Our integrated, citywide approach to tutoring over the next four years will provide annual grants to CBOs with a proven track record of academic success, match tutors to high-demand non-school sites, and offer consultation and training to help schools implement, monitor, evaluate, and continuously improve their tutoring programs. Our high impact tutoring program will provide the infrastructure, funding, and tutor supply so schools have everything they need to adopt a strong program, reaching students most in need of targeted academic support at each campus.

We must also work to address the trauma so many of our young people have experienced. We will dramatically expand our **mental health** services with a focus on significantly expanding DBH's School Based Mental Health Program to add mental health clinicians to an additional eighty-three schools this coming year, effectively placing an expert clinician in every school in the city. We will also launch a new pilot in the Healthy Futures initiative that will allow for onsite treatment for young children and their families at eight child development centers. Our approach to mental health also includes a focus on the power of play and enrichment as an avenue to manage anxiety, strengthen social-emotional learning, build confidence, and find positive outlets for self-expression. This includes new investments in DPR programming and Out of School Time for this summer and the upcoming school year, to ensure families have access to a rich array of social, recreational, and fun activities.

Our high schoolers have faced particular obstacles as they ready themselves for post-secondary opportunities, which is why we need to take action to ensure they are on a **strong path to college or career**. This requires an immediate investment in learning acceleration programs like high impact tutoring. It also requires an expansion of our dual enrollment model to motivate high schoolers with early college credit, and new mentorship grants to sustain them as they consider options and transition to post-secondary. Additionally, we are investing in a long-term strategy to reimagine high school as a critical bridge to connect DC students to in-demand jobs in the Washington region. DC will provide students with critical work-based learning

experiences through school-year internships in 12th grade, expand work-based learning experiences starting in middle school, and launch an Advanced Technical Center, which will serve as a regional hub of CTE programming and innovation to ensure wide access regardless of the specific school you attend.

Finally, we must attend to the critical **needs of our educators, and our families**. Our educators have worked tirelessly throughout this pandemic and deserve new personal and professional development opportunities. We will implement Educator Wellness and make professional coaching even easier for them to access, including virtually. Our families have also been towers of strength during this time while dealing with so much. We are excited to keep strong programs like Parent University and Wellness Wednesday going, and add new elements to reach more families and deepen the counseling support we offer. The DME will launch a Family Coaching program to place strong family coaches in up to 30 schools in the coming year. These coaches will help strengthen trust between families and provide them with support to navigate the available resources in and out of our education systems.

These are only some of the many initiatives we have planned for our recovery. We are also undertaking significant work in early childhood education to strengthen and stabilize that sector and drive an inclusive jobs recovery program to ensure all residents can find their way into promising, family sustaining jobs. We are setting the District up to not only continue to be the fastest improving urban school system in the country, but also to overcome the opportunity gap that has persisted.

Our road to reopening and recovery in education will require a comprehensive and collaborative approach. We look forward to continuing to partner with families, students, teachers, schools, and Council to ensure, as I said at the outset, we come out of this pandemic stronger and more resilient than before.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.