

Centering Equity in A Safe and Responsible Return to School

October 19, 2020



Major Lightfoot, CEO Jackson, and Chicago Board of Education,

On Friday, CPS announced that Pre-K and cluster program students will be returning to school during quarter 2. **The Grassroots Education Movement (GEM) coalition does not support any return to school plan that is not responsive to the demands of the Black and Brown community, the needs of Special Education students, or provide clear safety measures and the necessary support and staffing to equitably address student needs.**

As Pre-K and cluster program students represent some of our higher needs and medically vulnerable population, they consequently should be given additional support to manage the transition. The GEM coalition insists that equity and community voice must be centered in this planning.

- CPS surveys in July showed that the majority of Black and Brown parents selected to keep their students at home. There has been radio silence, and virtually no community engagement of families since the announcement of remote learning in August. Prior to any return to school for Pre-K and/or cluster students, we demand that **Black and Brown families be consulted in any decision to return to school.**
- There are over 24 zip codes that have double the city's current COVID19 positivity rate, predominantly in Black and Brown communities. There are 10 zip codes that have triple the city's current COVID19 positivity rate, predominantly in Latinx communities. For example, the Little Village community, as of October 13, has 4,704 confirmed cases, 57.7 cases per 1,000 people, and 62% cases among Hispanic and 14% Black. **We demand that those communities, who are at the most risk, be included in any decision making and planning.**
- The final hybrid learning framework released in August did not come close to answering enough questions to give families sufficient information to make an informed choice. Students in the cluster program have higher comorbidities and can be more at risk. **We demand that CPS implement CDC, IDPH, and CDPH safety guidelines feasibly and with fidelity. We need CPS to detail an extensive safety plan that incorporates these safety guidelines**
- Regardless of the hybrid learning plan, remote learning needs to be improved. Moreover, many of our priority group students also cannot return to school for various reasons. **We see no evidence that the district is incorporating teacher, parent and**

student feedback to create a pedagogically sound, developmentally appropriate, sustainable, flexible education virtually. CPS needs to work with, listen to, and incorporate into its guidelines, the feedback from educators, students and families who are dealing with the currently unworkable Remote Learning conditions.

- As COVID19 metrics have not decreased - we are experiencing statewide and local increases - **we demand the additional investments in facilities and staffing that would make the conditions safer to return.**
 - CPS has acknowledged the purchase of face masks, hand sanitizer and some plastic barriers for offices.
 - Any schools with safety/health facility needs (with ventilation and sanitation needs) must be invested in to be made safe. CPS must make investments in ventilation and HVAC systems that meet scientifically-accepted guidelines for filtering COVID19 in order to return to in-person learning.
 - CPS should make public the standards that determine:
 - The CPS threshold for what is deemed "safe".
 - The CPS definition of "proper ventilation".
 - The extent of CPS' commitment to a continuous supply of PPE, in an effort to maintain safety standards.
 - What is CPS's testing process for families and educators?
- The final hybrid learning plan did not answer many questions around learning if a child or staff is suspected to have COVID symptoms. **There needs to be a clear, transparent and accountable system – that parents and educators have been consulted on – for how schools will be cleaned and what protocols are enacted when a student or staff is thought to have or has COVID (ex. contact tracing).**
- Our students in temporary living situations are least likely to engage in remote learning and have not received the types of robust outreach, support or housing resources necessary to cope and thrive during a global pandemic. Resources must be devoted to ensuring that these particularly vulnerable students can learn and that their families are supported. These resources include internet access, computer devices, etc.
- Pre-K students also attending child care centers increase the rate of exposure to the virus for child care providers, staff and other children in child care. The intermingling of both the child care and school environments is very dangerous when there is no safe plan of return put in place. **CPS must collaborate with Child Care providers to ensure that there are mutually agreed upon protocols to ensure safety for all concerned.**
- Children with neurological differences and other underlying health conditions are most at risk to develop serious complications and even death if exposed to COVID19. Masks and social distancing is also harder for those with sensory and cognitive differences. **CPS needs to support both families who need to keep their children at home as**

well as how extra supports are implemented for students who select any type of hybrid learning.

While we believe that a staggered hybrid learning plan could be a viable future option, until CPS can engage families, educators and community in this decision-making process and provide scientifically-based, transparent evidence to answer the above demands, we cannot trust CPS to safely bring vulnerable populations back into schools. CPS is rushing into this hybrid plan the same way it rushed into remote learning and we cannot support it.

The GEM Coalition

Brighton Park Neighborhood Council
Caucus of Rank and File Educators, CORE
Chicago Coalition for the Homeless
Cook County College Teachers Union
Enlace Chicago
Illinois Families for Public Schools
Kenwood Oakland Community Organization
Logan Square Neighborhood Association
Lugenia Burns Hope Center
Northside Action 4 Justice
Parents 4 Teachers
Pilsen Alliance
Raise Your Hand for Illinois Public Education
SEIU Local 73
Teachers for Social Justice