



# Washington Teachers' Union

***Amplifying the Voice of DC Teachers***

Elizabeth A. Davis, President

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## **Washington DC Teachers' Will Not Sign Agreement to Reopen Schools to In-Person Learning**

*Cites rising COVID-19 Rates and Constantly Shifting DCPS Plans*

WASHINGTON — The Washington Teachers' Union (WTU) President Elizabeth Davis released the following statement regarding today after declining to sign a tentative Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with DC Public Schools.

“Over the past few weeks, we have worked diligently with our partners at DC Public Schools to create a framework that would allow our students to safely resume in-person learning in the coming weeks. However, given the lack of clear public health guidelines and the lack of engagement with administrators and teachers around reopening plans, the WTU has determined it is not in the best interest of our students, teachers, and all school-based employees to sign the MOA at this time.

“Teachers recognized that many individual students, especially those furthest from opportunity, need additional supports and that distance learning, despite the growth teachers have shown in its implementation, does not work for all students. We hope to return to our schools in a smart, data-driven manner that protects our students, teachers and communities from COVID-19. However, we can only do so when adequate protections are in place.

“The draft MOA focused on two major elements. First, we felt it was important to ensure that school communities were able to verify that all promised work in our school buildings was completed satisfactorily prior to reopening our schools. Through our work, DCPS has adopted a Facility Checklist that provides clear guidance to school communities. However, as DCPS moved forward with today's opening of CARE Classrooms, our members were increasingly frustrated by a lack of transparency and engagement in the reopening of these classrooms.

“DCPS has failed to share with us or the broader community a full list of schools that are reopening. Verification tours occurred prior to all work having been completed. Additionally, the lack of clear and transparent standards for air circulation gives us pause as we ask our members – or anyone – to reenter our school buildings.

“We believe our city's first priority must be safety. And the only way to build safety is through communication and trust. DCPS has fallen short on these measures.

“Second, the MOA also laid out provisions for teachers to return to school for in-person instruction. While we had a tentative agreement to allow teachers to 'opt-out' for the 2<sup>nd</sup> term, these protections would have ended on February 1 with the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup>

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term. With cases of COVID rising across the region and without clear guidance from the Mayor as to what level of spread would cause our schools to close, we cannot move forward with an agreement that could force anyone, regardless of preexisting conditions or their living situations, back into an in-person classroom.

“The WTU continues to have concerns regarding DC Public School plans to return elementary students to in-person learning and with the staffing for their CARE Classrooms. The current CARE Classroom plans will pull needed staff from our city’s middle and high schools to monitor – not instruct – students. The current plans to resume in-person learning would benefit just 7,000 elementary school students at the expense of nearly 43,000 other DCPS students, who would see larger class sizes or reduced supports. DCPS’s plans fail to adequately support those furthest from opportunity.”

“The WTU will continue to work in good faith to facilitate a safe return to our in-person learning. We will continue to prioritize the health and safety of our city’s students, school staff, and communities as we do so. The WTU encourages the Council to exercise its obligation to provide oversight of our public school system and to take up Councilmember Silverman’s legislation to require DCPS to submit a clear and detailed plan regarding reopening. Those that are most impacted by the decisions to reopen our schools should be heard and a part of the planning process.”

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*The WTU represents more than 5,000 active and retired teachers. It is dedicated to social and educational justice for the students of the District of Columbia and to improving the quality of support, resources, compensation and working conditions for the public servants and proud teachers who educate our students in D.C. Public Schools.*