



Washington Teachers' Union
FULFILLING THE COMMITMENT TO BUILD GREAT MINDS

News Release

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WTU: Teachers Want to Go Back to School and Want It Done Safely

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Washington Teachers' Union is working with its members on the issues involved in their fervent desire to return to in-school learning when it is safe for all educators and students, including the possibility of holding a secret ballot strike authorization vote this week.

"Teachers want to go back to in-school learning when they are assured that the buildings are safe," WTU President Elizabeth Davis said. "The well-being of all school staff and students is of the utmost importance. That said, if the District of Columbia Public Schools continues to refuse to work with us to ensure the safety of our school facilities, we must continue to discuss ways to protect our health and that of our students. That could include a strike authorization vote later this week."

Davis said she urged every teacher to return to school today, citing DCPS' authority to force teachers to return against their will.

Last week, an independent arbitrator found that two DCPS schools—Coolidge High School and Watkins Elementary—should remain closed because of COVID-19 safety issues and should not reopen until new walkthroughs are conducted and checklist violations are fixed. The WTU, however, believes there are other safety violations of its memorandum of agreement with DCPS and unhealthy conditions at multiple schools. The WTU is asking for additional school-by-school walkthroughs, especially given that DCPS had approved the reopening of Coolidge and Watkins. The WTU said these new walkthroughs should be conducted with WTU, mayoral and DCPS staff.

A vote of the membership could take place later this week to authorize the WTU's executive board to call for a strike on a date to be determined.

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, said educators and students need to be assured that schools are safe before returning.

"Let's be very clear: We are not trying to stand in the way of reopening. We are mirroring the fear we're hearing in communities and doing our best to work through that fear to make sure that when

school buildings reopen, all school staff and students can be confident that the critical safeguards—a metric for closure, testing, ventilation, cleaning, PPE and accommodations—are in place, and funded, so that we can meet the needs of our students,” Weingarten said.

Davis noted that the union is grateful that the district has prioritized teachers to receive the COVID-19 vaccination.

“We hope we can work with the mayor and chancellor and get educators and DCPS students back to safe and healthy schools without a strike. A strike will always be the last resort, and we hope it doesn’t come to that,” Davis said.

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