



Washington Teachers' Union
FULFILLING THE COMMITMENT TO BUILD GREAT MINDS

News Release

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WTU Asks Mayor and Chancellor to Establish a 'Situation Room' to Handle School COVID-19 Emergencies and to Partner on Safety Metrics

Death of DCPS Teacher Heightens Concerns

WASHINGTON, D.C.—As Washington, D.C., teachers continue to teach in classrooms and remotely, frustration and deep concern over continuing school safety problems heightened today as the [Washington Teachers' Union and the American Federation of Teachers sent a letter](#) to the mayor and schools chancellor asking to establish a "Situation Room" to deal quickly with COVID-19-related emergencies and to partner on school safety safeguards.

The letter came as WTU members voted against authorizing their union leaders to call a strike, demonstrating that they still want to work with city and district leaders on urgent action to safely reopen schools and want to exhaust all other remedies before authorizing a strike. At the same time, they were mourning the death of a Ballou STAY Opportunity Academy teacher, Helen Marie White, who died this past weekend after succumbing to the virus.

"We must make sure schools are safe. What keeps me up at night is that the district is putting the health of our city's educators and students at risk with in-school learning because of continuing exposures in schools, numerous reports of violations of agreed-upon safety protocols and, tragically, the death of a beloved teacher," said WTU President Elizabeth Davis. "Our teachers are pleading with the mayor and chancellor to wake up to the reality that things are not right or safe in our schools."

In the letter to Mayor Muriel Bowser and Chancellor Lewis Ferebee, Davis and AFT President Randi Weingarten said district teachers are ready to partner with them, replace lost learning through expanded summer learning options and ensure that 100 percent of students can be back in classroom settings for the 2021-22 school year. Davis and Weingarten also asked the two leaders to:

- Establish a "Situation Room" with the WTU to identify and respond to emergency issues requiring responses within 24 hours.

- Ensure that all D.C. Health and CDC COVID-19 guidelines and all provisions of the December 2020 Memorandum of Agreement between DCPS and the WTU are strictly adhered to.
- Establish clear metrics for the level of community spread that will result in a systemwide school closure.
- Require any school setting where an exposure has been confirmed to close immediately for at least 24 hours to allow for a deep cleaning.
- Establish and publish clear metrics for classroom and school closures that require schools to remain closed for more than 24 hours.
- Ensure that all educators, families and community members are notified within 24 hours of any possible exposure to COVID-19.

Davis expressed frustration that the situation has gotten to this point.

“We have been pleading with city and school leaders to work with us to ensure that our schools are safe and that families can be confident their children will be safe inside school buildings. It shouldn’t have gotten to this point. We need to move forward together with a sense of urgency. We can’t replace the loss of a beloved teacher, but we can use her memory to make the health of our students and school communities a top priority,” Davis said.

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