


Council of the District of Columbia

MEMORANDUM

1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20004

TO: Nyasha Smith, Secretary to the Council

FROM: Councilmember Elissa Silverman 

RE: Request to Place Measures on the Agenda for the December 15, 2020 Additional Legislative Meeting

DATE: December 10, 2020

I am writing to request that you agendize the following measures for the December 15, 2020 Additional Legislative Meeting:

- “Pandemic Learning Emergency Declaration Resolution of 2020”
- “Pandemic Learning Emergency Act of 2020”
- “Pandemic Learning Temporary Act of 2020”

In-person instruction is the best option both for learning and for social-emotional development, especially for our most vulnerable and high-needs students. However, returning to the classroom will only be successful if District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) families and staff have sufficient engagement and information to trust the plan.

The attached legislation would put in place mechanisms for increased engagement and transparency, without delaying or disrupting ongoing in-person learning plans.

First, the legislation would create a Pandemic Advisory Learning Council (PALC) to advise DCPS on the minimum guidelines for and current status of in-person and distance learning. The PALC would consist of individuals representing the Mayor, labor unions, and parents or guardians of DCPS students. Second, it requires the Mayor to publish in-person learning threshold metrics that, if exceeded, require review of the minimum public health guidelines for in-person learning and notification of the PALC. Third, it would call for the publication of in-person learning data, including COVID-19 testing and cases and education details, such as the types of in-person learning operating by school and grade and basic profile information about DCPS students attending in-person. Fourth, it ensures that asymptomatic testing for COVID-19 remains in place for DCPS students and staff during the public health emergency.

The pandemic necessitates more collaboration and transparency than under typical learning conditions. DCPS families and staff have expressed frustration that they are unable to make informed decisions due to late and incomplete information. The combination of regular data reporting and the creation of an advisory body with labor unions and families will support informed decision-making and better planning under these unusual circumstances. For families who feel urgency to return students to school, the legislation would not impede re-opening plans, but rather

ensure that DCPS pairs urgency with sufficient collaboration and transparency to rebuild and retain trust in the process.

The Council, as the elected body for the District of Columbia, has a duty to ensure that the District's schools are safe and that the public has sufficient information both for their own decision-making and for oversight. This legislation balances that duty with the need for DCPS to have the necessary flexibility to bring students and staff to school buildings quickly and responsibly.

A copy of the measures is attached. Please contact Maya Brennan, Policy Advisor, mbrennan@dccouncil.us with any questions.

cc: Members, Council of the District of Columbia
Office of the Secretary
Office of the General Counsel
Office of the Budget Director
Mayor's Office of Policy and Legislative Affairs