

October 22, 2020

A Commitment to Equity

From the Chancellor

This post is an email sent by Chancellor Ferebee to the DCPS community on October 21, 2020.

Dear DCPS Community,

One of DCPS' core values is Equity; specifically, working proactively to eliminate opportunity gaps and investing in effective strategies to ensure every student succeeds. Our decision to reopen elementary schools (<https://dcpsreopenstrong.com/schedule/term2/>) and welcome back some students for in-person learning is this value realized across our district. For our youngest scholars and students furthest from opportunity, we know that learning is best when it happens in person, at school.

We fully recognize that for some elementary school families, returning to school is not something they are interested in pursuing. That is a choice they will continue to have since learning at home is still taking place.

However, we know that for many of our families, learning at home is not the best option for their children. Especially for young learners, learning at home requires more engagement from the caregiver during the school day. Devoted time and attention may simply not be possible due to work responsibilities, childcare considerations, and other factors such as literacy levels or language barriers.

In our current all-virtual learning model, the opportunity gap is real. Learning loss is happening. And we need to reverse this trend by opening schools to support our students who need the classroom experience the most, while also ensuring the needs of our staff are met, and our health and safety commitments are prioritized. Earlier today, I was on the Kojo Nnamdi Show (<https://thekojoannamdishow.org/shows/2020-10-21/dc-public-schools-to-start-in-person-instruction-but-should-they>), and a caller asked about these learning loss specifics.

We decided to focus our reopening plans around known opportunity gaps: our youngest learners, English Learners, those experiencing homelessness, or students receiving special education services. What does in-person instruction offer them?

For students receiving special education services, providers can offer supports that are difficult to provide virtually, such as physical or occupational therapy. For students who are not reading on grade level, the ability to have intensive language and literacy instruction is limited in a virtual environment, particularly for young learners. We also know that for students who are 3- to 5-years-old, their attention span is limited when learning virtually. Our early childhood and Kindergarten teachers have the ability to provide instruction in the classroom that meets the specific learning needs of those young ages.

Being at school also supports the emotional and physical wellbeing of our students. It ensures students receive a healthy meal each day. It allows them to build relationships with their peers, both in the classroom and outside on the playground.

We recognize that in our effort to meet this commitment of equity, the introduction of new learning models in Term 2 impacts our school community in a variety of ways. We will have more to share with you tomorrow that builds on the topic of student schedules and staff planning.

Thank you to all who joined our community town hall this evening. We will have another one next Wednesday, October 28, at 5:00 p.m., and you can get all the details here (<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/community-telephone-townhall-on-the-dcps-reopening-plan-tickets-101244478962>). If you missed tonight's presentation, it's available to watch on Mayor Bowser's Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/>)

[v=1097832460631367&ref=watch_permalink](#)).

I appreciate all that you do for your students' success, and we will be in touch with more tomorrow.

Sincerely,

Lewis D. Ferebee, Ed.D.
Chancellor

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