COMMUNICATIONS
STATEMENTS
Statement by Michael Casserly, Executive Director, Council of the Great City Schools
On the Verdict in the Chauvin Trial

Yesterday, in Minneapolis a jury reached a guilty verdict in a murder trial that has the potential to serve as an inflection point in our nation’s history. When George Floyd was killed last summer by police officer Derek Chauvin, the nation’s urban public schools offered our full-throated condemnation of his killing and the racism behind it. While this verdict cannot bring back Mr. Floyd and the many lives unjustly lost in America’s communities of color due to police brutality, it does rekindle our hope that this country can grow and that justice for all can be realized.

Today, the nation’s urban public schools commit to ensuring that equity and racial justice for all of America’s citizens serve as our North Star. We vow to do our part in helping our students, staff and graduates step into their communities holding the highest regard for the value of the lives of their neighbors. We take solace in the justice that was served yesterday and recognize that tomorrow we must continue to push against the walls of racism and inequality to ensure that our students enter a society that values them and their contributions to a world where there is equal protection under the law. The Council will continue to fight to ensure racial justice and use our collective efforts to make sure our schools are nurturing and welcoming environments for students, particularly students of color, as we work toward creating an equitable nation free of ignorance, fear, and prejudice.
Statement on Critical Race Theory

By
Michael Casserly, Executive Director
Council of the Great City Schools

While the arc of history may bend toward justice, the unfolding story of social change is often a series of fits and starts, a steady volley of progress and pushback. In the wake of the George Floyd killing a year ago, America embarked on a new chapter of introspection and dialogue around race and society. The pushback was inevitable, and it has come in the form of opposition to the teaching of critical race theory. Never mind that elementary and secondary schools do not, for the most part, teach critical race theory; there is political advantage to be had. Critics and some state legislatures have now bundled nearly every discussion involving race and equity under this heading and cast it as divisive, unpatriotic, and un-American. In fact, our schools have a moral and patriotic obligation to teach a balanced and comprehensive history of our nation, including events that others have hidden or conveniently avoided.

Education, by definition, should equip us with all the facts and information we need to form our own opinions and perspective. All the facts, not some of the facts. Not just the facts that make us proud. Otherwise, it is just indoctrination. The complete, unabridged story of American history is one of triumph and of tragedy, of great ingenuity and immense injustice, and we need to talk about both. That means that when we talk about race and our history, we need to not only celebrate the contributions of African Americans to music, sports, cuisine, language and literature, medicine, and business throughout the years, but also to explore the attitudes that led to hundreds of lynchings that occurred up to modern times. We need to highlight the contributions of Hispanic Americans to the agriculture, art, and aerospace industries, but include the study of the Melendez case (a precursor to Brown vs. Board of Education) and the systematic seizure of acreage and property from Mexican American landowners in Texas in the early twentieth century. We need to cover the contributions of the Navajo code talkers to winning World War II, and the horrors of the Trail of Tears and the systematic murder of the Osage for oil headrights. And it is as important to study the contributions of Chinese Americans to building the Transcontinental Railroad as understanding the racism behind the Chinese Exclusion Act. Our history is also not complete without an understanding of both the contributions of and oppression of peoples of differing faiths, gender orientations, disabilities, and languages.

If our history makes some people uncomfortable, then so be it. If some people need to be reminded that everyone was born equal and that no one is superior to anyone else, then let’s remind them. If some people are surprised to learn that our culture and institutions, including our own schools, have advantaged some and disadvantaged others, then it’s about time. This is not an unfortunate by-product—this is the purpose of education. And it is perhaps the most patriotic act possible. Because if we believe that our children are heirs to a great nation that is striving to be better and more equitable, then we need to make sure that they understand both the history of that nation, and the important role they will play in determining its future. In our quest for a more perfect union, a great nation is not afraid of or threatened by this history or the discussion of it. On the contrary, it is our ongoing dialogue and steady—if not smooth—progress toward justice and equality that makes us great.
Statement on the Passing of Tom Payzant
By the Council of the Great City Schools


“Tom Payzant was a tireless advocate for urban public education and a relentless warrior on behalf of urban children and he will truly be missed,” said Council Executive Director Ray Hart.

Payzant led the Boston school system for 11 years and under his leadership, the school system experienced dramatic improvement in student achievement, with increased test scores on both state-mandated tests and SAT college entrance exams. From 2003–2005 Boston's fourth- and eighth-grade students displayed the largest improvement in math scores of the 11 major cities participating in the National Assessment of Educational Progress Trial Urban District Assessment.

In 2004, Payzant was presented with the Green-Garner Award, the nation’s highest honor for urban education leadership, at the Council’s 49th Fall Conference in Las Vegas.

After leaving Boston, he served as a senior lecturer at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where he focused his time with students and faculty interested in urban school district reform; leadership; and ways to connect research, policy, and practice in urban school districts. Prior to serving as superintendent in Boston, Payzant served as assistant secretary for elementary and secondary education in the Clinton administration.

The Council family extends its deepest sympathies to Tom’s family, who he loved deeply and from whom he drew strength and courage.

###
PRESS RELEASES
Legacy Award Presented to Council Executive Director
For His 44 Years of Service in Urban Education

$10,000 Scholarship Comes with the Award

WASHINGTON, March 22 – Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, received the first-ever Dr. Michael Casserly Legacy Award for Educational Courage and Justice at the Council’s Legislative/Policy Conference.

Former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan presented the award to Casserly during a virtual award ceremony honoring Casserly’s achievements in urban education.

Casserly took the reins of the Council in January 1992 after serving as the group’s director of legislation and research for fifteen years. He is now believed to be the longest-serving chief among the major national education membership organizations.

The Dr. Michael Casserly Legacy Award for Educational Courage and Justice will be presented annually to a person who has made outstanding contributions in the field of K-12 urban education. Future recipients will be chosen for personifying what Casserly has based his career on: taking a courageous and passionate stance on the issue of educational justice and equity.

The award comes with a $10,000 scholarship sponsored by Curriculum Associates. The scholarship is for a graduate of the Council’s 77-member school districts pursuing a graduate-level degree in education, and the award recipient will select the scholarship winner.

The history of the Council under Dr. Casserly’s leadership includes numerous examples of the organization staking out positions that are often cutting-edge and potentially controversial for a
national coalition, but are always focused on a moral core that puts first all of the 8.4 million youth that the Council collectively serves.

Dr. Casserly was the only head of a national education organization to support the 2002 *No Child Left Behind* legislation, doing so because of its emphasis on closing achievement gaps for specific at-risk student groups. The law was enacted under Education Secretary Rod Paige.

The Council also played a major role in initiating what became known as the Common Core State Standards, and was the first national membership group to endorse them.

“For more than 40 years, Michael Casserly has diligently worked to improve public education for the nation’s urban school children,” said Michael O’Neill, chair of the board of CGCS. “His contributions have led to some of the most significant legislative actions and best practices in urban public schools; and he has earned a well-deserved national and international reputation as a thoughtful, committed, data-driven and bipartisan leader. So, it is only fitting that Dr. Casserly be the first recipient — and namesake — of this new award. We are profoundly grateful for his fearless, tireless and courageous leadership; and we are honored to celebrate his legacy.”

After more than 30 years as executive director of the Council, Casserly will step aside at the end of June 2021, and Ray Hart, the Council’s research director, will assume the role. Casserly will then assume the role of Strategic Advisor to CGCS through 2024.

###
WASHINGTON, March 31 – The American Rescue Plan (ARP) recently enacted by the Biden Administration is the single largest investment in federal elementary and secondary education in the nation’s history. The 77-member school districts that comprise the Council of the Great City Schools are expected to receive some $40 billion in supplemental funding from ARP as part of the $122.8 billion provided under the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund.

In addition, school districts will receive additional funds from new appropriations for virus testing, the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and the FCC’s Emergency Connectivity Fund to cover the costs of student devices and off-campus internet connectivity, and other provisions—on top of the federal aid that was approved by Congress in December.

Careful planning will be critical over the next few years in coordinating the various streams of new and traditional federal funding districts will receive to safely reopen schools, address student learning needs and mental health services, as well as maintain and upgrade school facilities.

To help with this effort, the Council has formed a high-level national task force composed of 20 diverse superintendents, school board members, chief academic officers, chief operating officers, chief financial officers, chief information officers, English language learner (ELL) directors, special education directors and other experts from the nation’s largest big-city school systems. The task force will develop guidance for and aid to urban school systems across the country in the planning and use of federal funds to effectively build the long-term capacity they need to continue their improvement.

In addition, the Council will form a series of 10 working groups around specific areas such as instruction, infrastructure, technology, communications, data and research, and other areas along
with weekly job-alike calls with senior-level administrators to share draft proposals and best practices.

“The financial support from the ARP provides an historic opportunity for the Great City School districts to address the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on urban students, as well as to fund essential investments that advance educational excellence and equity in the long term,” said Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. “It is critical that districts spend the money smartly, strategically, effectively and in a transparent way. It is the aim of this special task force to provide our member districts with the practical and timely support they need as they work diligently to safely reopen schools and expand equitable opportunity for the students they serve.”

The effort by the Council of the Great City Schools is supported through a grant from the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation.

###
U.S. Department of Education Launches National Summer Learning & Enrichment Collaborative to Help Students Most Impacted by the Pandemic

APRIL 26, 2021
Contact: Press Office, (202) 401-1576, press@ed.gov

NOTE: Press interested in covering the launch of the Collaborative may register here to receive updated meeting information and links to join National Convening on April 26 and 27.

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) launched the Summer Learning & Enrichment Collaborative today, providing support to 46 states, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Bureau of Indian Education, and three territories working together to use American Rescue Plan and other federal pandemic relief funding to support as many students as possible through enriching and educational summer programming. Summer programs are key in the nation’s efforts to address lost instructional and extracurricular time as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Collaborative—a partnership between ED, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Governors Association, and other national partners—follows President Joe Biden’s call to action at ED’s National Safe School Reopening Summit to, “work together to ensure that all children have access to high quality summer learning and enrichment opportunities this summer and beyond.” Biden added that, “This is essential for all students, particularly those disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, students of color, English learners, students with disabilities, homeless students, and all those who went without in-person instruction this year.”

The Collaborative brings together state and local leaders working alongside key stakeholders to design evidence-based summer programs that address the lost instructional, social, and extracurricular time students have experienced as a result of the pandemic, especially underserved students and those disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

“Too many students have experienced interruptions in learning and negative effects on their social and emotional wellbeing due to time apart from friends and community,” said Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona. “Summer presents a key opportunity for school districts and community partners to accelerate learning and provide new avenues for students to safely engage with each other in fun activities. Let’s use this moment to reimagine what fun, engaging summer programming can look like, make it accessible for all students, and work together to make sure our communities recover and rebuild stronger than they were before the pandemic.”

The American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) Fund provides nearly $122 billion to states and school districts and requires that states invest at least $1.2 billion on evidence-based summer enrichment programs. Under the ARP ESSER Fund, school districts are also required to use at least $21 billion for evidence-based initiatives to address the impact of lost instructional time, including summer programs. ED recently released the ARP ESSER state plan application template, which invites states to describe their plans for how they will engage their communities to distribute and utilize ARP ESSER funds.

Over the next two days, ED will convene states for virtual learning sessions to kick off the Collaborative. The Collaborative aims to both take a national approach to understanding best practice and rapidly setting up fun, innovative, and engaging summer opportunities for students, while also facilitating regional and local level partnerships to ensure speedy and robust implementation of state- and district-level plans.

The convening will include sessions on forming state-level coalitions; using evidence to inform summer programs; and using federal funds to promote equity through summer enrichment.
opportunities that support social, emotional, and academic development. Speakers include: Secretary Miguel Cardona, Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker, Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson, Illinois State Superintendent of Education Dr. Carmen Ayala, Arkansas Secretary of Education Johnny Key, Education Trust Interim CEO Denise Forte, National Summer Learning Association CEO Aaron Dworkin, and Founder of the Harlem Children’s Zone Geoffrey Canada. Participants will discuss how to design summer programming in ways that create safe, welcoming, and inclusive environments that reengage students socially, emotionally, and academically as they recover from the impacts of COVID-19.

Summer activities can include opportunities to accelerate learning, along with a broad array of enrichment activities ranging from physical fitness and health education; arts programs; science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) activities; and career and technical education (CTE) programs; to youth development. For older students, these opportunities can include a work-based learning or community service component.

The Collaborative also emphasizes the importance of offering the necessary supports to ensure all students have access to summer learning and enrichment programs—including students with disabilities, English learners, students from low-income backgrounds, and students experiencing homelessness. In addition to the launch of the Collaborative, ED recently released Volume 2 of the COVID-19 Handbook, which outlines strategies to meet the needs of underserved students, including summer learning opportunities.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently released guidance for operating youth and summer camps during COVID-19. The guidance is intended to help camp administrators operate camps while preventing the spread of COVID-19 and protecting campers, their families, staff, and communities. The Summer Learning & Enrichment Collaborative will prioritize and maintain a clear and ongoing emphasis on health and safety in all summer offerings.

Organizations participating in The Collaborative’s convening include:

- AASA, The School Superintendents Association
- American Camp Association
- American Federation of Teachers
- Boys & Girls Clubs of America
- Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
- Council of Chief State School Officers
- Council of the Great City Schools
- National Association of Elementary School Principals
- National Association of Secondary School Principals
- National Education Association
- National Governors Association
- National League of Cities
- National Rural Education Association
- National Summer Learning Association
- National Youth Employment Coalition
- Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
- RAND Corporation
- StriveTogether
- The Afterschool Alliance
- The Education Trust
- The National Comprehensive Center
- Wallace Foundation

Additional information about the Collaborative is available here. Planning meetings as well as regional and theme based convenings will take place in May through July, and the Department will
provide additional technical assistance to states and districts upon request. At the end of the summer, the Department will hold a second national convening to discuss implementation success and challenges.
Austin Independent School District

Board Considers Planning Partner Ahead of Possible November 2022 Bond

May 11, 2021
By Anne Drabicky

Austin ISD will take the first step toward updating plans for buildings and other infrastructure as trustees on Thursday discuss hiring a planning partner to update the district's Long-range Facilities Plan.

Formerly known as the Facility Master Plan, the new LFP will guide everything about how AISD uses its buildings and will lead, if trustees choose at a later date, to a robust community engagement process before a 2022 bond election.

The last major updates to the plan came ahead of the 2017 Bond, with additional direction for athletics, fine arts and Career and Technical Education in the 2019 update. As the first step in the process to call for a November 2022 bond election, the revised plan would also lay the foundation for what could be included in a new bond.

“The LFP really begins to identify the priority of schools that need improvement,” said Beth Wilson, executive director of planning and asset management. “It’s about making a timeline, making sure that schools and other district facilities get the improvements that they need to line up with the district’s vision of modernized schools.”

Often referred to as a roadmap, the LFP, like the FMP before it, helps the district, community leaders and advisory groups to prioritize which projects may end up in a bond.

Equity as the Guide

AISD will approach this process and any potential bond in a more intentional way than the 2017 process, with a clear focus on equity and on hearing from the more marginalized groups within the community.

Ali Ghilarducci, supervisor of community engagement, said the biggest difference for 2021 will be the use of an Equity by Design approach. That approach will look
closely at the data about who the district is serving most poorly and then begin conversations with those groups.

“So when we’re developing our plans, we’re not creating solutions for people but we’re working side-by-side to identify what they would like to see to address the problems they’re seeing with their schools,” Ghilarducci said. “This is at every step of the decision-making process, from even defining what the problem is, to identifying assets and opportunities and developing a shared vision.”

In partnership with the Equity Office, all staff and consultants working with the district on the LFP and the bond will receive equity training and cultural proficiency and inclusion training.

If approved by trustees, the district also will create a Long-range Planning Advisory Committee made up of students, parents, community leaders and staff who will provide recommendations about what projects to include in the 2022 bond.

“It starts with data gathering and meeting with focus groups, community leaders, faith-based leaders, and community and student representatives from all over the district,” Wilson said. “This is the first step.”

The approval of a contractor to act as planning partner for the LFP and bond process is among the items on the agenda preview section of this week’s Information Session. DLR Group has been proposed as the firm to work with AISD.

Trustees do not take action during information sessions. The next regular voting meeting is scheduled for May 27. A Facebook Live interview with district leaders about the LFP is scheduled for May 12, at 6:30 p.m. in English and 7 p.m. in Spanish.

Meeting Highlights

Trustees will also be discussing some potential changes to how the board itself operates. The proposed policy changes have several goals, including to increase transparency and provide more opportunities to hear from the public.

The changes being considered were developed in partnership with the Council of Great City Schools and include adding a timeline for the development of agenda items for each meeting and adding opportunities for feedback on agenda items.

The board will hear details about the recommended $1.73 billion (general, food service and debt service) budget for 2021–22, which reflects a $39.2 million deficit for the general fund. The district estimates it will pay $709 million in recapture to the state, based on a projected 7.9% increase in property tax values.
The recommended budget does not take into account the $155 million in one-time federal funds approved by the U.S. Department of Education and recently released by state officials.

This week's Information Session also will include general public comment, which means those who call to share their thoughts may give feedback on any topic. Anyone wishing to record public comment may do so by calling 512-414-0130 between 7:45 a.m. and 3 p.m. May 13.

Agenda Preview

At each Information Session, staff provide trustees and the public a preview of items that will be up for a vote or on consent during the next Regular Voting Meeting. This week's preview includes:

- 8.3: Innovative Course Approvals—High schools can offer courses based on student interest and college and career paths.
- 9.1: Approval of a contract for dairy products for food services with Oak Farms Dairy.
- 9.3: Approval of a contract for internal audit services.

For complete details, including how to sign up to share public comment, please view the agenda online.

###
Six in 10 Parents Plan to Vaccinate All of Their Children and Large Majority of Parents Would Feel Safer Sending Kids to School if Most Other Children Were Vaccinated

Parents’ intent to vaccinate their children closely corresponds with their own intention to do so, but there is variance across racial groups and based on ages of children

NEWS PROVIDED BY
COVID Collaborative
May 17, 2021, 00:01 ET

WASHINGTON, May 17, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- Released today, a new survey from the COVID Collaborative, Ad Council, and the Council of the Great City Schools shows that 61% of parents plan to vaccinate all of their children, but 27% will not vaccinate any of their children and 12% remain mixed or undecided. Vaccination intent in parents varies across racial and ethnic groups, with Asian American and Pacific Islander parents being the most likely to vaccinate their children (77%) and Black parents being the least likely (55%). And while at least 65% of parents of children ages six to 17 plan to vaccinate their children, only 56% of parents of children under the age of six will vaccinate their children.


Vaccination intent is especially prevalent in conversations about children returning to school. There is widespread support for making vaccines and information about them available at public schools (80%), and nearly three in five (59%) parents of children in school support requiring students to get vaccinated to attend school in person. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of parents with
children in school would be more likely to vaccinate their own children if such a requirement were in place.

Parents least likely to say they will get their children vaccinated against COVID-19 include those who live in small towns and rural areas (42% will get all children vaccinated), those age 18 to 29 (46%), women 18 to 39 (51%), White mothers (51%), Black mothers (45%), women without a college education (47%), Independents (48%), and Republicans (53%); and most of these groups are among those least likely to say they have been or will get vaccinated themselves. "Parents want to keep their children safe and in school," said John Bridgeland, CEO of COVID Collaborative. "This survey provides important insights to increase parent confidence in vaccination, which will enable children to be safe for in-person learning, on playgrounds, and for other activities that help them grow and thrive."

The research was conducted by Hart Research for the COVID Collaborative, a national assembly of experts across health, education, and the economy working to support local, state, tribal, and federal leaders in turning the tide against the pandemic. The Collaborative has partnered with the Ad Council to address vaccine hesitancy with a COVID-19 Vaccine Education Initiative and the "It's Up To You" campaign to ensure the American public has the latest and most accurate information about the COVID-19 vaccines. The Collaborative also has partnered with the Council of the Great City Schools on a range of education initiatives, including utilizing schools as vaccination sites.

"With COVID-19 vaccines now approved for children ages 12 and up, our vaccination education campaign with the COVID Collaborative will focus its efforts on getting good information to parents and their pediatricians," said Lisa Sherman, CEO of the Ad Council.

The survey shows that parents trust doctors and experts the most when it comes to recommendations about vaccinating their children. A recommendation from their child's pediatricians would earn trust from 83% of parents, and more than three in four say they are more likely to vaccinate their children upon hearing from top scientists and physicians that the vaccine is safe (76%) and 100% effective (77%) in children. Parents also fear the risk of the virus to their children. 70% of parents are worried that their children could get COVID-19 and view protecting their children as an important reason to vaccinate their children (83%) and themselves (77%). Nearly one in five (18%) parents have a child who is at high risk.

"Parents trust their pediatricians when it comes to their child's health, and that includes important questions they have about immunizations. I encourage all parents to talk with their pediatrician about the COVID-19 vaccine so they can get the information they need to make this decision," said Lee Savio Beers, MD, FAAP, president of the American Academy of Pediatrics, a member of the COVID Collaborative. "Vaccinating children and teens will protect them and allow them to fully engage in the world again. That's why we are thrilled to partner with the Ad Council and the COVID Collaborative on the vaccine education campaign."

The Council of the Great City Schools has demonstrated the central role that school districts can play in COVID-19 response, including as vaccination sites for parents, children, and others in the community. "There are numerous examples across the country of school districts stepping up as
vaccination sites," said Michael Casserly, Executive Director of the Council of the Great City Schools. "As the country works to vaccinate children and youth, we need to utilize more schools to help keep students and others in the community safe."

**About the COVID Collaborative**

COVID Collaborative, a project of UNITE, is a national assembly of experts, leaders and institutions in health, education and the economy and associations representing the diversity of the country to turn the tide on the pandemic by supporting federal, state and local COVID-19 response efforts.

The COVID Collaborative is co-chaired by former Governor and U.S. Senator Dirk Kempthorne (R-ID) and former Governor Deval Patrick (D-MA) and led by Co-Founder and CEO John Bridgeland and President Gary Edson. COVID Collaborative includes expertise from across Republican and Democratic administrations at the federal, state and local levels, including former FDA Commissioners, CDC Directors, and U.S. Surgeon Generals; former U.S. Secretaries of Education, Homeland Security and Health and Human Secretaries; leading public health experts and institutions that span the country; the Business Roundtable, National Association of Manufacturers, and U.S. Chamber of Commerce; the NAACP, UnidosUS, National Urban League, and the National Congress of American Indians; the Skoll Foundation, The Allstate Foundation and The Rockefeller Foundation; and associations representing those on the front lines, from the American Public Health Association and Association of State and Territorial Health Officials to the Council of Chief State School Officers and the Council of the Great City Schools. Tim Shriver is Chairman of UNITE.

To learn more, visit [www.CovidCollaborative.us](http://www.CovidCollaborative.us), and follow the COVID Collaborative on Twitter and LinkedIn.

**About the Ad Council**

The Ad Council has a long history of creating life-saving public service communications in times of national crisis, starting in the organization's earliest days during World War II to September 11th and natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Sandy. Its deep relationships with media outlets, the creative community, issue experts and government leaders make the organization uniquely poised to quickly distribute life-saving information to millions of Americans. The Ad Council is where creativity and causes converge. The non-profit organization brings together the most creative minds in advertising, media, technology and marketing to address many of the nation's most important causes. The Ad Council has created many of the most iconic campaigns in advertising history. Friends Don't Let Friends Drive Drunk. Smokey Bear. Love Has No Labels. The Ad Council's innovative social good campaigns raise awareness, inspire action and save lives. To learn more, visit [AdCouncil.org](http://AdCouncil.org), follow the Ad Council's communities on Facebook and Twitter and view the creative on YouTube.
New Study Shows Students in Large City Schools Are Mitigating The Effects of Poverty Faster than Others

Analysis Shows How Large City Public Schools Narrowed Gap with Nation in Reading and Math by Half to a Third

Individual City School Districts Show Significant Progress

WASHINGTON, June 29 – Students in the nation’s urban schools are about 50 percent more likely to be poor, twice as likely to be English learners, twice as likely to be Black or Hispanic, and about 50 percent more likely to have a parent who did not finish high school as students in all other schools. Yet despite these factors often correlated with low student achievement, urban school students are making significant progress academically, according to a new report by the Council of the Great City Schools.

The study, *Mirrors or Windows: How Well Do Large City Public Schools Overcome the Effects of Poverty and Other Barriers?* used the last ten years of data in reading and mathematics at the fourth- and eighth-grade levels from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to answer the question of whether schools are windows of opportunity – and help overcome poverty and other barriers – or they are mirrors of society’s inequities. Data was also used from the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) of NAEP, which the Council initiated in 2000 so that the nation’s largest school systems could track their progress against other cities, states, and the nation. Twenty-seven large urban school districts volunteered to participate for the 2019 urban NAEP.

Using both general NAEP student-level data and district-specific TUDA student-level data, the study looked at poverty, language status, parental education, disability, literacy materials in the home, and race ethnicity to assess student achievement. The study then predicted student results based on all of these variables and compared those predictions against actual results over six separate administrations of NAEP between 2009 and 2019.
Findings from the study suggest that poverty was not necessarily destiny in urban public education. The analysis showed that:

- Students in large city schools narrowed the gap with students in all other schools in both reading and math at fourth and eighth grade levels between 2003 and 2019 by a third to a half, depending on grade and subject;

- After considering differences in poverty, language status, race/ethnicity, disability, educational resources in the home, and parental education, large city schools had reading and mathematics scores on NAEP that were significantly above statistical expectations at both the fourth- and eighth-grade levels in 2019 (the latest year NAEP was administered) and in most years since 2009; and

- After factoring in these variables, students in large city schools consistently had significantly higher results on NAEP than students in all other schools in the aggregate.

Several big-city school districts demonstrated results that were significantly above expectations in 2019 in at least three of four subject/grade combinations on NAEP: Boston, Miami-Dade County, Hillsborough County, Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Cleveland, New York City, Duval County, Fort Worth, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, the District of Columbia, Austin, and Guilford County. In addition, six districts improved their ability to “beat the odds” in at least two grade/subject combinations over the ten years studied: District of Columbia, Detroit, Miami-Dade County, Chicago, Cleveland, and Atlanta. The study showed a number of notable examples of significant results—

Boston consistently demonstrated some of the highest fourth- and eighth-grade reading and mathematics effects that were well above statistical expectations in every grade, subject, and year between 2009 and 2019.

Chicago was one of only a handful of urban school districts that showed gains in district effects in at least two grade/subject combinations, and it was one of the few districts showing gains between 2009 and 2019 that went from below expectations to above in at least one area.

Dallas showed reading and mathematics results that were above statistical expectations in three of four grade/subject combinations, and it produced a district effect that was well-above its scale scores in all grades and subjects.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools not only scored higher on NAEP than Large City School averages in all areas, the district outperformed All Other Schools, public and private, nationally in 4th grade reading and mathematics. In addition, Miami-Dade County Public Schools’ district effects exceeded All Other Schools in 4th and 8th grade reading and math. Miami-Dade County emerged as the only district to be in the top rankings in both average scores and district effects in three of four NAEP assessments.

Finally, the District of Columbia Public Schools posted the largest increases of any of the TUDA districts in all four grade and subject combinations tested, outperforming expectations in reading and math, and improving faster than any other major city school system in the country. Detroit was the second fastest improving in three of four grade/subject combinations.
Finding Out How Districts Improved

In an effort to find out the reasons some urban public-school districts seem to be mitigating barriers and increasing student achievement faster than others, the Council conducted site visits to six districts that demonstrated substantial improvements: Boston Public Schools, Chicago Public Schools, the Dallas Independent School District, the District of Columbia Public Schools, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, and the San Diego Unified School District. The Council also visited two other districts that were not making as much progress to compare practices.

The Council conducted these visits to find out if there were approaches or strategies these districts were using that could inform the work of other major urban school systems. The visits revealed several common practices the districts were taking connected to the progress seen in student performance. They included: strong and stable leadership focused on student instruction; high academic standards and well-defined instructional support; strong professional development and school-based support structures; systemwide change; accountability and a culture of collaboration; resilience and resourcefulness in the face of adversity; support for struggling schools and students; and community investments and engagement efforts.

“While urban school districts have not overcome or mitigated the barriers before them entirely, it is clear from the data in this study that large city schools may be doing a better job of mitigating the effects of poverty, discrimination, language and other barriers than other schools in the country,” said Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. “We know there is more work to do, but by examining the extent to which urban schools are “beating the odds” we know that with the right strategies and practices the nation’s large city schools can and do improve, but they can significantly raise student achievement and produce results that defy expectations.”

The exhibits below compare the differences between statistically expected results and actual NAEP results in large city schools and all others, showing that large city schools produced a larger than expected result in most years, subjects, and grades.

**Trends in District Effects† on NAEP Fourth-grade Mathematics by School Type, 2009 to 2019.**

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<td>1.15*</td>
<td>0.90*</td>
<td>1.14*</td>
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† District effect is the difference between the actual district mean and the expected district mean.
* District effect is significantly different from zero at $p < .05$. 
Trends in District Effects† on NAEP Eighth-grade Mathematics by School Type, 2009 to 2019.

† District effect is the difference between the actual district mean and the expected district mean.
* District effect is significantly different from zero at $p < .05$.

Trends in District Effects† on NAEP Fourth-grade Reading by School Type, 2009 to 2019.

† District effect is the difference between the actual district mean and the expected district mean.
* District effect is significantly different from zero at $p < .05$. 
Trends in District Effects† on NAEP Eighth-grade Reading by School Type, 2009 to 2019.

† District effect is the difference between the actual district mean and the expected district mean.
* District effect is significantly different from zero at $p < .05$.

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Four Urban Students Named 2021 Math and Science Scholars

Four Urban Students Named 2021 Math and Science Scholars

Council of the Great City Schools Awards CGCS-Bernard Harris Scholarships

WASHINGTON, June 30 – Four graduating high school seniors have been selected by the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) to receive the 2021 CGCS-Bernard Harris Math and Science Scholarship. The students were chosen from several hundred applicants in big-city school districts across the nation for their academic performance, leadership qualities and community involvement.

Now in its third year, the scholarship was created by former NASA astronaut Dr. Bernard Harris, the first African-American to walk in space, to encourage and assist promising students of diverse backgrounds who plan to pursue science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) studies after high school.

The awards were given to two African-American and two Hispanic seniors from high schools in four of the 75 urban school districts represented by the Council.

“These scholarships are a wonderful way to promote academic excellence in math and science and foster the next generation of STEM leaders,” said Dr. Harris. “The achievements and aspirations of these young men and women are truly inspirational and it is my hope that the scholarships they receive will propel them to a future of fulfilling their dreams.”

Each scholar will receive $5,000 for continued education in a STEM-related field. This year’s award winners are:

- Saul Balcarcel-Salazar, John A. Ferguson Senior High School, Miami-Dade County Public Schools
• Destiny Caldwell, Scotlandville Magnet High School, East Baton Rouge Parish School System
• Natalie Martinez, Godinez Fundamental High School, Santa Ana Unified School District
• Emini Offutt, Hume-Fogg Academic Magnet High School, Metro Nashville Public Schools

In the fall, Balcarcel-Salazar will attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and major in physics. Caldwell will study mathematics at the University of California, Los Angeles. Martinez plans to study mathematics at the University of California, Irvine and Offutt will pursue a degree in computer science at Vanderbilt University.

“These competitive scholarships will provide talented minority students in big-city school districts a way to pursue STEM studies after high school and excel in their career pursuits,” said Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council. “We appreciate the generous support of the Harris Institute to help these young men and women create a brighter future for themselves and become the leaders and innovators of tomorrow.”

Administration of the scholarship program, including the application process, pre-selection and presentation of awards, is provided by CGCS. Dr. Harris makes the final selection of recipients.

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About The Council of the Great City Schools
The Council of the Great City Schools is the only national organization exclusively representing the needs of urban public schools. Composed of 75 large city school districts, its mission is to promote the cause of urban schools and to advocate for inner-city students through legislation, research and media relations. The organization also provides a network for school districts sharing common problems to exchange information, and to collectively address new challenges as they emerge to deliver the best possible education for urban youth. www.cgcs.org

About The Harris Institute
The Harris Institute is a 501 (c) (3), non-profit organization founded by former NASA Astronaut Dr. Bernard A. Harris, Jr., to serve socially and economically disadvantaged communities locally and across the nation striving to reach the most underserved populations in the areas of Education, Health, and Wealth. The institute supports programs that empower individuals, in particular minorities and economically and/ or socially disadvantaged, to recognize their potential and pursue their dreams. The education mission of The Harris Institute is to enable youth to develop and achieve their full potential through the support of social, recreational and educational programs. The Harris Institute believes students can be prepared now for the careers of the future through a structured education program and the use of positive role models. More than 50,000 students have participated and benefited from THI programs. www.theharrisonfoundation.org/
FOR RELEASE
July 1, 2021
CONTACT: Tonya Harris
at: tharris@cgcs.org

Orange County Superintendent to Lead Council of the Great City Schools

WASHINGTON, July 1 – Barbara Jenkins, superintendent of Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Fla., becomes chair of the Council of the Great City Schools’ Board of Directors for a one-year term, effective July 1.

The 150-member board is composed of the superintendent and a school board member from each of the 75 big-city school districts represented by the Council.

Jenkins has served as superintendent since 2012 and under her leadership, the district won the prestigious Broad Prize for Urban Education in 2014 and has repeatedly been recognized by the College Board for increasing access to Advanced Placement course work, while simultaneously maintaining or increasing the number of students earning exam scores for college credit.

She succeeds Michael O’Neill, vice-chairman of the Boston School Committee for Boston Public Schools. O’Neill will assume the position of immediate past chair.

Kelly Gonez, school board president for the Los Angeles Unified School District, becomes chair-elect, stepping up from the Council’s secretary-treasurer post.

Rounding out the Council’s 2021-22 leadership team will be William Hite Jr., superintendent of the School District of Philadelphia, who has been elected to the secretary-treasurer post.

“The Council of the Great City Schools is extremely fortunate to have Jenkins, a recognized education leader, as its next chair,” says Council Executive Director Ray Hart. “The wealth of knowledge and expertise Jenkins and her leadership team brings will provide important direction and guidance to urban schools as they prepare to resume in-person learning this fall as well as develop plans to effectively spend federal COVID-19 relief funds to address student needs.”

###
OP-EDS
The Hill—Op Ed

Parents are key to ending the pandemic — but will they vaccinate their children?

By Steven Phillips, John Bridgeland & Michael Casserly

The U.S. may finally be seeing the light at the end of the COVID-19 tunnel. To reach herd immunity and return to full societal activity and productivity, we will need America’s parents to allow the vaccination of their children.

The CDC has relaxed masking and other preventive guidelines, as cases, hospitalizations and deaths are significantly down in most states. The back-to-normal index of U.S. economic activity now stands at 89 percent of its pre-pandemic level and is rapidly increasing. This turnaround is due to rapid development, access and administration of highly effective vaccines now reaching nearly 60 percent of the adult population with at least one dose.

Although everyone wants to get back to normal, there is a worrisome polarization on the role of vaccination in achieving this goal. A blue state-red state divide in vaccination rates is emerging across the country.

The nation’s 75 million children are about to enter this battlefield. Those under 18 comprise about one-quarter of the population and generally require parental consent to be vaccinated under state law. With current vaccination trends nearing demand saturation in adults, it’s likely that children will occupy the last national vaccination combat zone that determines whether 75 to 80 percent of the population has the immunity that allows a safe reopening of the country.

Children are the last in line for vaccine eligibility. Until recent FDA emergency use authorization (EUA) of the Pfizer vaccine for ages 12 to 15, children under 16 were ineligible for vaccination. Nearly all children will eventually become eligible through EUAs as vaccine trial results allow. As the country waits for such approvals, more communicable variants and seasonal upturn of virus infection in fall and winter will emerge, right when children return to school and in-person day care. Even if the absolute likelihood of severe illness in children is low (and some get long COVID-19 or multi-inflammatory syndrome), the asymptomatic carriage of the virus presents a significant transmission risk in multi-generational households. Unvaccinated adults may suffer the consequences of living with unvaccinated schoolchildren. How will parents, whose risk tolerance for their children is typically very low, respond to this complex shifting landscape?

A new COVID-19 Collaborative poll of parental views on vaccinating their children provides cause for both concern and hope. While 61 percent of parents plan to vaccinate all their children, 27 percent will not and 12 percent are undecided. Unsurprisingly, parents do for their children as they do for themselves. The poll finds 84 percent of parents who have or will be vaccinated also intend to do the same for their children. A similar percentage who will not be vaccinated also will not vaccinate their children.

Mothers more than fathers tend to be the “deciders” for their children and vaccine hesitancy is higher for parents with younger children. Those with the highest hesitancy are people living in
rural areas, Black and white mothers, women without a college education, lower-income households, independents and Republicans.

The survey also revealed practical steps to increase children’s vaccination uptake. Pediatricians are the most trusted parental voice and their offices are a desired and convenient administration platform. Parents fear the risk of virus to their children, and view protecting them as an important reason to vaccinate the entire family.

But it is school districts across the country that will play a central role in COVID-19 response. There is widespread parental support for making vaccines and information about them available at public schools (80 percent). Most parents (59 percent) of school children support mandatory vaccination for in-person attendance. Nearly three-quarters would be more likely to vaccinate their own children if such a requirement were in place.

History’s lessons from the school-based polio vaccine distribution of six decades ago underscore the importance of achieving and maintaining public trust in the process. Their success ultimately resulted in the elimination of domestically acquired polio in the U.S. There are now many examples across the country of school districts stepping up as COVID-19 vaccination sites.

Other polls have indicated that incentives could be powerful drivers for parental intent. Single dose vaccines, airline, sporting and entertainment event entrance requirements could successfully encourage parents to vaccinate themselves and their children.

Perhaps it was inevitable that concern for the health of our children would be a final test of national resolve. The vaccination of children is a litmus test of a fractious country’s path to addressing the closing chapter of our pandemic. It’s a fortuitous irony that parental concern for the safety of their children may do more to motivate their own vaccine intention. With carefully crafted local incentives, mandates and trusted voices, the whole family may get vaccinated. And America could put the pandemic behind us.

*Steven Phillips is vice president of science and strategy at Covid Collaborative.*

*John Bridgeland is CEO of the Covid Collaborative*

*Michael Casserly is executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools.*
ARTICLES
ARTICLES- CORONAVIRUS CHALLENGES AND RESPONSE
COVID-19 changed schooling profoundly — in some ways, for the better

March 21, 2021 at 6:00 am

By Peggy Barmore
The Hechinger Report

There’s no going back.

That is the consensus emerging from education leaders across the country as the nation enters a second year of schooling in a pandemic.

A public school district in Arizona is looking to become a service provider for parents who have pulled their children out to home-school them. In Oklahoma, students are having a say in where and when they learn. And educators everywhere are paying closer attention to students’ mental well-being.

“None of us would have ever wanted to go through this,” said Deborah Gist, the superintendent of schools in Tulsa, Oklahoma. “We have a chance now to make it something that will change teaching and learning forever for the better.”

At the outset of the pandemic, schools nationwide had to make swift and drastic changes in public education to keep students learning. And while teachers, principals, district leaders and parents forced to shift to virtual learning are eager for an end to the emergency measures, many are already looking ahead and considering which education solutions have worked well, and what parts of public schooling should be permanently altered.

The changes to schools go beyond the sudden dive into education technology. In fact, some of the most exciting education solutions forced by the pandemic have very little to do with giving every student a device.

In many districts, educators are reconsidering old norms about schedules and thinking about how to incorporate more community-based learning. The pandemic’s disruptions have also forced schools to get more proactive about communicating with families, especially in places where remote learning has turned homes into classrooms. Some educators are listening more closely to student and parent voices, and a few are even going door to door. And they’re placing greater weight on the emotional well-being of all members of a school community, a
gratifying development for experts who have long called on schools to pay attention to the way home life can affect children.

“This is a disruptive moment” for schools, said Robin Lake, director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) at the University of Washington, Bothell. “There are so many discoveries, realizations — so much innovation,” she said.

CRPE collaborated with the RAND Corp., Chiefs for Change, the Council of the Great City Schools, and the education consulting firm Kitamba last year to assemble and survey a panel of more than 375 school district leaders and charter management organizations from around the country about the changes the pandemic has wrought. (The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation sponsored the project and is among the many funders of The Hechinger Report and Education Lab.)

The big take-away: “Public education will never be the same,” according to Lake. “They said, ‘We’re never going back fully to the old ways.’”

Forced by necessity to be more flexible to individual student needs, some schools are thinking about how they can better design learning around kids’ interests and passions. “The ability to be unbounded by the offerings that are in a school building and the kind of one-size-fits-all approach has been liberating for people,” said Lake.

Tulsa Public Schools is one example of a district thinking about education solutions outside the classroom box. Even before the pandemic forced its schools to go remote, the district was piloting ways to move education out of the classroom and into the community. One program, Tulsa Beyond, gave a small group of students at several district high schools — in partnership with educators and community members — the opportunity to design and implement a new vision of what high school should look like.

The resulting three models varied, but each called for real-world, hands-on, work-based learning experiences. The new models had been operational for a semester when COVID-19 forced them to pause. But the pandemic also opened a door after all Tulsa schools closed when COVID-19 hit, according to Andrea Castañeda, the district’s chief innovation officer.

“All of a sudden [students] got a level of independence, time management and decision-making autonomy that a traditional school usually doesn’t afford,” she said, which whetted their appetite for more such opportunities.

Now, the district is determined to sustain the program and create new, richer opportunities that could eventually take all students outside school more often.

“We’re going to be able to grow and expand on [learning outside the school building] more than we would have been able to do before the pandemic,” said Gist, the superintendent. “Our students need the ability to learn outside of their school through internships, through apprenticeships, through concurrent learning with higher education and technical schools.”
The district is going to be “investing heavily” in these programs in the future, according to Castañeda, using federal coronavirus relief funding to support the design and administration of this doubling down. “Our goal is to have rich programming available across the district,” she said.

In Arizona, schools across the state have taken advantage of loosened regulations to get creative about education solutions, according to Emily Anne Gullickson, CEO and founder of the nonprofit A for Arizona, which funds innovation in public education.

“That flexibility to adapt quickly allowed school leaders to step back and look at what is and isn’t working and how to pivot quickly,” Gullickson said.

Her organization has given grants of $20,000 or more to schools and districts to launch a number of new programs. The proposals included after-hours study groups for third graders to work with a qualified teacher or tutor to stem learning loss during the pandemic; an outdoor learning hub to reengage students who weren’t attending online classes; and an in-person small learning community with social and emotional supports for students suffering from trauma.

Vail School District in Vail, Arizona, had parents in mind when it applied for and received a $60,000 grant from A for Arizona to offer school services a la carte to the 150 families who switched to home schooling during the pandemic and need extra support. “We were thinking as educators, but just as much as parents,” said Darcy Mentone, a spokesperson for the district, who was part of the brainstorming team that came up with the idea.
A year into the coronavirus pandemic, many public schools in the United States remain closed for in-person instruction. While some experts assail the prolonged widespread closure of public schools for causing students to experience declines in mental health and academic performance, others see a blessing in disguise that will empower alternative forms of education.

When the coronavirus pandemic was declared in March 2020, schools around the world ceased holding in-person instruction. Many school districts transitioned to virtual learning, where students would meet with their teachers via digital platforms such as Zoom. The widespread closure of public schools continued in most cases for the remainder of the 2019-'20 school year.

When the 2020-'21 school year began, many school districts in the U.S. continued to conduct classes entirely virtually or embraced a "hybrid" model where students attend classes in-person for part of the week while distance learning the rest of the week. While only a small number of school districts offered full, in-person learning for all students at the beginning of the school year, that number has expanded as the year progresses.

The extended closure of public schools in the U.S. has had negative effects on American students. Still, it might have opened up other opportunities for education in the long term, according to experts who spoke with The Christian Post.

Education Week has kept track of the reopening statuses of member districts in the Council of the Great City Schools. This collection of school districts, featuring some of the largest school systems in the country and one in
Canada, contains more than 8.2 million students. It accounts for 15% of the total public school enrollment nationwide.

While 56 of the 75 districts included in the Council of the Great City Schools currently offer some type of in-person instruction, a significant number of them have not offered widespread in-person learning for any part of the school year, which is well into its second semester.

Portland Public Schools, the largest school district in Oregon, has not opened for in-person learning this year. The district will implement a hybrid option for students in kindergarten through fifth grade in early April and a hybrid option will begin for older students later that month.

Other districts that have yet to hold in-person learning this school year but will offer it in some form before the conclusion of the academic year include Sacramento City Unified School District in California, Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, Kentucky, Kansas City Public Schools in Missouri, and Long Beach Unified School District in California.

Richmond Public Schools, one of the largest school districts in Virginia, will remain completely virtual for the duration of the second semester. School districts in Fresno, Oakland and Santa Ana, California, have yet to open for widespread in-person learning this school year. But they have opened classrooms for select groups of students, such as those enrolled in classes for students in which English is a second language and special education programs.

Our people who shared their perspectives on the consequences of the widespread closure of public schools include a senior official with a conservative-leaning think-tank, the author of a book detailing her experience educating her children during the coronavirus pandemic, the president of a coalition of Christian schools and universities, and the author of a book urging parents to pull their children out of public education.

Consequences of widespread public school closures

According to Hadley Manning, the policy director for the Independent Women's Forum, who has extensively studied the consequences of school closings, the widespread closure of public schools "has exacerbated some existing inequalities in our educational system."
In an interview, Manning said that while many families have the "means and resources to put together a homeschooling pod, hire a private tutor, put the children in private school or to make other arrangements," students who come from families who lack the aforementioned means and resources "have been working essentially on their own at home through virtual learning, which the data would suggest is no replacement for in-person schooling."

David Dockery, the president of the recently formed International Alliance for Christian Education, echoed Manning's concerns.

"I think students from strong families, particularly — where both parents are educated — there will be strong efforts to ensure that those students are taken care of and almost a homeschooling approach provided," he said.

"But for so many families ... both parents working, both are busy, not able to provide the care and instruction needed for the students who are missing that from their teachers, I think we don't know the impact of that at this time, but it's certainly a concern for all of us."

Dockery, the chancellor of Trinity International University in Illinois, said he's "concerned" for students in primary school, saying that in-person instruction for elementary grade students is “vitally important.”

Emily Greene, the author of School, Disrupted: Rediscovering the Joy of Learning in a Pandemic-Stricken World, who researches and writes about education, creativity, the neuroscience of learning, agreed with Dockery.

"It doesn't take an advanced degree to realize that [the] format of [online] learning is not how young children learn," she said.

Manning expressed concern for "children who have essentially lost a year of education because their school system has been closed and they haven't had access to good alternatives." She warned that "those children may face a real education deficit."

"I think that would be ... a totally reasonable expectation to see the education gap widening between children who are advanced and who continued to advance during the pandemic and children who probably have seen some backsliding."

"It's pretty common knowledge that over the summer months, when schools are typically closed, you see some sort of regression educationally among
students who are out of school for the summer, but this is like a summer that has lasted for 12 months,” she continued.

"One of the biggest failures with virtual learning is that you can't make kids show up," Manning remarked. "For example, in Boston, only half of the students showed up for online instruction on any given day."

"The question of school closure is much bigger than an academic question," she said. "It's a question about what's best for children broadly speaking, not just in terms of their progress on reading, writing and arithmetic, but their social and emotional development, their mental health, and their ability to have a safe place to be during the day."

Manning also spoke about the mental health impacts of the widespread school closures and the accompanying social isolation.

After citing reports about "higher numbers of youth reporting depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms" and suicide attempts, Manning maintained that it was hard to get concrete mental health statistics because the U.S. has a "delayed reporting system" when it comes to suicide rates.

In Japan, which Manning said "has one of the fastest data capturing systems in the world when it comes to suicide rates," previous data from the fall showed an 80% increase in the suicide rates among women.

"There's an impact certainly on the mental health of our young people, our children and also I would say on parents because there is that additional layer of stress that comes with trying to educate children at home while also continuing to provide financially for the family," she contends.

“Many families depend on two incomes, and so that math doesn't work out. Two full-time jobs plus the job of overseeing virtual education at home is too much for many working parents," Manning said.

Another unintended consequence of keeping schools closed for in-person learning, Manning asserted, relates to the reporting of child abuse because "the school system is a very important part of our child abuse reporting mechanism in this country."

"Aside from parents, family members, pediatricians, teachers and school counselors are some of the most important people in preventing child abuse
or stopping child abuse,” Manning stressed. “And so we've lost that with the widespread closure of public schools.”

Opportunities presented by widespread public school closures

Lt. Col. Ray Moore is the chairman of the board for publicschoolexit.com, a website designed to provide resources for parents seeking to withdraw their children from public schools.

Moore, an Army Reserve chaplain and an outspoken critic of contemporary public education, sees a silver lining in public schools’ widespread closure and the accompanying adaptation of virtual learning.

With many parents at home with their children, they have the opportunity to listen to what they are learning at school.

"The public school curriculum is coming into their living rooms, and some of it is just terrible, borderline pornography,” he asserted. “They teach sex education in ways that are not compatible with Christian teaching. And the parents are seeing on the computer in their living rooms, and they’re just horrified.”

Moore said that in some districts, public schools are “trying to get parents to sign a document saying that they will not look at the curriculum that their children are getting in their living room.”

“[It's] pretty amazing that they would go that far,” Moore told CP.

For example, a Tennessee school district asked parents to sign a waiver promising not to listen to or monitor their children’s virtual learning sessions due to concerns about "confidential information about a student being revealed."

The district later issued guidance that would allow parents to "assist their children during virtual group lessons with permission of the instructor."

"They are fearful, the public school people are fearful that the parents will discover what they've been doing to harm the children, and they are in fact discovering it,” Moore concluded. “The system's out of control. It can't correct itself.”
Moore elaborated on the content that some public school children have been exposed to in school, including lessons related to the Black Lives Matter movement, transgender ideology and critical race theory, which he described as "viruses that have attached themselves to the education system."

In addition to slamming the "anti-Christian" philosophy that has infiltrated some public schools, he reiterated that the U.S. and other nations find themselves in "a 100-year moment for private Christian schools and homeschooling."

While acknowledging the tragedy of the COVID-19 pandemic, Moore said that the widespread closure of public schools has provided "an unprecedented opportunity for K-12 Christian schools and homeschools to really accelerate and grow exponentially."

Moore pointed to studies finding that a significant share of students who attended public schools before the pandemic might never return to the state-run schools when the pandemic comes to an end and in-person learning resumes on a mass scale.

Although Dockery was "expecting an enrollment decline of perhaps deep significance because of the coronavirus," he told CP that "overall our enrollment has maintained health."

“The level has been better than what we expected, and there are a handful of schools that even have shown increases for which we are both surprised and grateful,” Dockery said.

Greene agreed with Moore that the widespread closure of public schools was "a long-overdue disruption of a very outdated education system" that triggered "the most robust period of innovation in the entire history of education in America."

She told CP that "American society and American parents have relied on outsourcing their education to schools for 100 years and in a blink, we experienced how fragile that framework is."

"Parents started opening their mind for new ways for children to learn, which is so exciting," she recalled.

Greene cheered one new method of learning: the increased establishment of "learning pods," a form of homeschooling where a group of parents and their
children band together, and each parent would teach the children a specific subject.

She also disagreed with the notion that children learned less during the widespread closure of public schools than they would have if they were attending school for in-person learning.

"Many families experienced this completely new vast expanses of free time during the pandemic and the things that parents and children did to discover new talents and passions, new interests and curiosities in this free time might very well lay the foundation for their future careers," Greene added.

"The way that families got outside in new ways during the pandemic, there's a completely new path of learning for many kids who go to public schools and get 20 minutes of outside time per day. There was a verifiable explosion in making things, in hands-on making things, meaning people who never picked up a needle and a thread started making things with their kids. People who never baked cookies all of a sudden were making sourdough starters, and it goes on and on and on."

Greene concluded that if the insight was available to measure “how our kids actually grew during the pandemic, we might discover that they learned more than they would have in traditional schools."

Moving forward

The experts who spoke with CP shared their thoughts on what they think the state of American education will look like following the pandemic and what changes they would like to see regarding education in the U.S. going forward.

Manning predicted that following the pandemic, Americans will "have a greater appreciation for the importance of education. Not simply as a means for educating children but as a means for learning social skills and allowing peer-to-peer interaction." She also expressed hope that "many of these bills that have been proposed in state legislatures to allow for greater school choice" will become law.

Specifically, Manning would like to see policies enabling "all families to have an education savings account that is funded by the state and allows them to direct their education dollars" to public schools, private schools, homeschool pods or other education models.
Manning favors the implementation of a "robust school choice policy" that extends beyond "people who have the resources" and "the financial security that supports alternative methods."

Dockery hypothesized that following the pandemic, "parents will take more responsibility for the education of their children" and "Christian education in various forms" will "expand and be strengthened."

He told CP that he believes society has "learned a new level of flexibility that will lead to new levels of innovation for the days ahead."

"I think we have learned that online education is here to stay," he added. "I think we have all learned how to use online learning, and we will continue to do so, making it not an auxiliary option but a significant part of our educational offerings," Dockery said.

“So yes, I agree that the changes that have been implemented during the COVID season will likely remain with us, but I think our schools have adjusted well to the hybrid model, and we'll be healthy and maybe even stronger as a result of it."

With the expansion of homeschooling following the pandemic, Moore suggested that "it's possible the public school system will begin to implode and unravel and ideally collapse."

He surmised that such a scenario would allow the U.S. to "revert back to a private, free-market, Christian and home education, which was the original American model for the first 200 years of American history."

"Public education is a socialistic model in education. And socialism never works," Moore asserted. "It always is very self-destructive, and it's not working now in education. So public education is pretty well dysfunctional, and a lot of people know it."

Moore envisioned an America where parents and churches were working together by "rescuing the children" from public schools, believing that such an arrangement would lead to the home transforming into a "biblical learning center" that "strengthens marriages" and ends up "revitalizing the family."

Greene praised the rise in parental engagement that has accompanied the coronavirus pandemic. She expressed hope that when the pandemic is over, people will not forget that "ultimately, the people who are most responsible for
our children's education are the parents." She warned that "without the parents' voice in the revitalizing of our education system in this final moment, things will simply regress into status quo."

“So this is the time for people to stay engaged and speak up and not just slide back into outsourcing our children to schools,” the author said.
House Education Committee Chairman to Big City School Districts: Don’t Mess This Up

The chairman of the House Education Committee told big-city school districts that they better use the coming windfall in relief funds in a way that leaves no doubt the funding drove improvements.

By Lauren Camera, Senior Education Writer  March 22, 2021, at 5:14 p.m.

REP. BOBBY SCOTT TOLD the leaders of the country’s big city school districts Monday that they’re set to receive a windfall of federal relief to help reopen schools for in-person learning. But they better use it in a way, he warned, that leaves no doubt that the funding drove improvements.

"You have a lot of work to do," Scott, Virginia Democrat and chairman of the Education and Labor Committee, told the Council of the Great City Schools during its annual legislative conference. "The biggest school districts are the ones with the most challenges."

"The achievement gap got worse, and in some areas it may have gotten a lot worse," he continued. "So we need to acknowledge that and find out how bad it got and then show that the money we provided and focused according to the Title I formula made a difference."

Despite the fact that the country's public school system is tiptoeing back to life, urban school districts account for the majority of the holdouts to providing in-person instruction – and for good reason as they've faced significantly more challenging circumstances to reopening. The Council of the Great City Schools represents 76 of the country's largest urban public school systems, 42 of which currently offer some types of in-person learning.

Not only do many of them still have high community transmission rates, but their school facilities tend to be older, with poorer quality heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems. They lack the extra indoor and outdoor space that their suburban and rural counterparts have to help keep children socially distanced. And many of them also lack the funding of their well-resourced peers to provide personal protective equipment and sanitization, hire additional staff – including nurses, social workers, janitors and bus drivers – and establish testing and tracing programs.

Most notably, the low-income, Black and Hispanic communities that urban districts more often serve have been disproportionately impacted by the coronavirus. Their students are expected to have some of the greatest academic, social and emotional learning losses coming out of the pandemic.

The $1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan included $122 billion for K-12 schools, in addition to $7.6 billion for students with disabilities and $10 billion for testing and tracing. The relief can be
used for a variety of things, including to purchase personal protective equipment, improve ventilation, obtain additional space to ensure social distancing, bolster payroll to prevent layoffs, hire additional staff, fund summer or after-school programs to blunt learning loss or provide Wi-Fi hotspots and devices.

The pot of funding is being disbursed using the formulas used to distribute Title I – the federal funding stream meant to offset resource discrepancies for districts that serve lots of low-income families whose children often start school at a disadvantage compared to their wealthier and often whiter peers. The formula takes into account the size of a district and the child poverty levels.

New York City, the largest school district in the country, is expected to receive $5.2 billion, according to congressional documents obtained by U.S. News – by far more than any other. Meanwhile Los Angeles Unified School District is set to receive $2.8 billion and Puerto Rico is set to receive $2.7 billion. Smaller urban school districts with very high child poverty rates are also slated to get a windfall, including Philadelphia, which is set to see $1.7 billion and Detroit, which is set to see $930 million.

"Some of the school districts where the poverty rates are off the chart are getting a significant amount of money," Scott said. "We want to show that it was bad, but because you had the resources you did a good job. Without the assessments, you can't make that argument."

"Take the money, use it well and show us the good job you did so we will be empowered to make the argument that money made a difference."

Scott's remarks are part motivation for the districts, which still face serious reopening challenges despite the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention revising its social distancing guidance from 6 feet to 3 feet last week, and part serious warning that without something to show for it, Democrats' ability to argue for future funding increases will be all but gone.

After all, congressional Democrats succeeded in fending off efforts to slash funding for education in the relief bill by Republicans who argued that schools still hadn't exhausted all the federal relief included in previous coronavirus stimulus packages.

Education Secretary Miguel Cardona also addressed the group of urban school leaders Monday, where he acknowledged their challenges and also reiterated his goal of helping every school district reopen for in-person learning.

"The work that we've had to do as leaders in education this past year is not something we could have predicted, planned for, and I know it's not something that's part of any preparation program that you've been a part of," he said. "But you've had to do it. And it was a difficult time to lead, but even as commissioner I know this pandemic has served to sharpen our swords in the larger fight of inequity."

"I want to be clear that my primary focus right now is reopening schools as quickly and safely as possible," he continued. "For me that's the greatest equity lever I can pull right now."
As of January, 43 percent of 4th graders and 48 percent of 8th graders were still learning full time from home, according to newly released federal data. And the new numbers point to alarming disparities among regions and states in the quality of that remote learning, with a subset of those remote learners—a quarter or more in both grades—receiving fewer than two hours of live or “synchronous” teaching a day.

The long-awaited data, produced by the agency in response to an executive order from President Biden, offer the first nationally representative picture of what proportion of schools offer remote learning, in-person learning, or a hybrid of the two.

In all, 47 percent of grade 4 schools nationwide offered full in-person teaching, and 46 percent of grade 8 schools did. But because many schools are small or remote—and also because families have chosen from among different options—that translated to only 38 percent of grade 4 students and just 28 percent of grade 8 students attending full time in person.

When hybrid learning is added into the picture, more than 75 percent of schools offer at least some in-person instruction. And though the data are limited to two grade levels, federal officials say enrollment patterns are probably similar for other elementary and lower secondary grades.

It’s encouraging news that many schools now offer some in-person learning, said Peggy Carr, the associate commissioner of the assessment division of the National Center for Education Statistics. But she also described the regional contrasts in the amount of live remote teaching as shocking.

“I knew it was going to be low, but not quite that low,” she said.

**A quickly changing picture of schools’ instructional mode**

President Biden made opening “a majority” of K-8 schools within his first 100 days in office for five-day in-person learning one of his top priorities, but his administration did not set a target for the share of students. The new baseline data suggest that the school target has probably been met by now, but it is much less clear whether, more than two months later, at least half of students are now attending in person five days a week.

Many larger districts have been more cautious about returning to in-person schooling. The federal data also show that students in towns or rural locations were more likely than those living in cities or suburbs to be attending in person.

But that picture has shifted dramatically since the federal survey was taken, too, according to Education Week’s tracker of large, urban districts, a project it’s created with the Council of the Great City Schools.
In early February, only about 43 of a sample of 75 large districts in the EdWeek tracker offered some in-person learning, and that number is now 59. Many of these districts have moved from allowing only a limited number of students to attend in-person to letting all students come to school. In addition, many of these districts plan to expand their in-person access even further over the next few weeks.

Uneven access to in-person learning—and uneven amounts of live, remote teaching

The federal data bolster other surveys indicating that Black, Hispanic, and Asian students were more likely to be offered—or to prefer—remote learning. Just 28 percent of 4th grade Black students and 15 percent of 4th grade Asian students were attending in-person full time. Almost half of white students, by contrast, were attending full-time in person; white families have been among the most vocal about returning to schools in cities like New York.

The data were collected earlier this year and represent a sample of 7,000 schools, half in grade 4 and half in grade 8. Additional collections will produce monthly results for the same sample of schools February through May.

But below the surface, the findings raise new questions about how states and districts have managed teaching and learning plans during the pandemic.

For one thing, while many districts said they'd planned to prioritize certain groups of vulnerable students to return to classrooms first, the data do not suggest that such plans led to widespread differences in in-person attendance patterns. Schools notably said in the survey that they prioritized students with disabilities for full-time, in person learning, but fewer than half of those students in 4th grade were doing so.

The findings that look at the subset of students in full-time remote learning show some shocking differences in their access to live-streamed teachers. Twenty-seven percent of those 4th graders and 26 percent of those 8th graders received two or fewer hours of live, synchronous instruction in their remote classes—the rest of their schooling was presumably asynchronous. But students in other states or districts learning remotely got five or more hours of live teaching.

And it appears some of those disparities are due to regional differences. In Oklahoma, 71 percent of 4th grade students in remote learning received two or fewer hours of live teaching, and 73 percent of 8th grade students in Idaho received two or fewer hours of live teaching. Students in cities and in the Northeast typically got more live teaching in their remote classes than did those in towns or in the Midwest.

Parents and advocates alike have urged districts to improve their remote learning offerings; many are concerned about their children’s well-being in remote settings. But the political discussion on school reopening has focused almost exclusively on returning to in-person settings.

The data also do not conform easily to theories about why some districts offered more live-streamed remote teaching than others. Labor contracts have shaped some teaching conditions, modes, and hours, but the data don’t appear to correlate easily to states where unions are strong.

In fact, the states reporting the highest proportion of 4th grade students receiving less than two
hours of synchronous instruction are Alabama, which has no public-sector unions, and Arkansas and Oklahoma, where unions are significantly weaker than on the coasts.

It could be the case that, since most students in those states appear to be attending in person, many districts there simply are no longer prioritizing the quality of their remote learning option, or do not have the staff to maintain it.
Reopening hurdles linger for schools, despite rescue funding
By Carolyn Thompson
March 26, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — The latest federal coronavirus relief package includes $81 billion that began flowing to states this week with the goal of helping schools reopen quickly — with one obstacle being that many of the districts’ problems can’t be solved by money. Many parents want to keep their children home. Teachers have pushed back at reopening plans. And some districts say state guidelines on social distancing keep them from bringing all students back at once.

The money is welcome assistance for districts that have had to spend enormous sums on ventilation systems, laptops and protective equipment. With the end of the academic year approaching quickly, however, many are looking ahead to how to best spend the new money next fall.

For some districts that have yet to bring large number of students back to classrooms, no amount of money can help in the near term.

The Hillsboro School District, one of Oregon’s largest, plans to begin introducing limited in-person learning for some students this month but cannot bring all students back full time because of guidelines on issues such as social distancing and bus transportation, said Beth Graser, a district spokesperson.

“There simply aren’t people to hire to drive the buses we have, much less the fact that we would need to go through a purchasing process to secure additional buses if we were to increase our fleet to the point where we could feasibly overcome the transportation constraints,” Graser wrote in an email.

The money released this week is part of $122 billion included for K-12 schools in the $1.9 trillion virus relief bill. Schools are strategizing over how to use the money over the next couple years to undo the pandemic’s damage to the pace of learning and students’ mental well-being.

Nearly half of U.S. elementary schools were open for full-time classroom learning as of last month, according to a survey by the administration of President Joe Biden, who has pledged to have most K-8 schools open full time in his first 100 days in office. While the administration touted the relief package as a way to help reopen schools, officials in some districts say they won’t tap into the new funding for months.

In Ohio’s Youngstown City School District, where about 40% of students are back in classrooms part-time, CEO Justin Jennings doesn’t expect the newest federal money to change those numbers before the school year ends.
That’s partly because students already were offered the opportunity to return for in-person learning, and partly because the district doesn’t even expect to draw on the latest funding until at least the summer, Jennings said. Then it may go to more protective equipment, upgrading schools’ air filtration systems and broadband access, and investing in transportation to allow for better social distancing, he said.

About 60 of the 77 large urban districts that make up the Council of the Great City Schools are at least partially open, Executive Director Michael Casserly said, and most of the rest already had plans to reopen by the middle of April. The new funding will help with the return to in-person learning, he said.

“There’s a fair amount of money that will go to just efforts to reopen the buildings and make sure that everybody is safe,” he said. “Those will be one-time expenditures that the school districts will make that won’t necessarily build any long-term capacity, but they will help open the doors.”

In Hartford, Connecticut, Superintendent Leslie Torres-Rodriguez said she expects the relief money will help the district bring more students back by expanding efforts to connect with families of students who have been absent or disengaged. The district has done close to 4,400 home visits this school year but often has lacked the resources to address the root causes of the problems, she said.

“Additional social workers, mental health and wellness supports would be so important and most immediately needed,” she said.

Amid signs of slipping academic achievement, the school district in Connecticut’s capital is encouraging all students to return for in-person learning on March 29, including some 9,600 students who have opted for virtual learning.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said last week that students can safely sit 3 feet, instead of 6 feet, apart inside classrooms as long as they wear masks. But officials in some districts say that won’t allow them to increase the number of days students learn in person unless state governments adopt the same guidance.

“If the guidance is permissible, we are excited to be able to do that,” said Jeffrey Rabey, superintendent of Depew Public Schools in Buffalo’s suburbs, where schools are operating with a hybrid model.

One of the biggest obstacles remains parent fears about the spread of the virus in schools, said Andre Perry, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. He said districts have to show parents they are safe, especially in traditionally underserved schools where bathrooms often lacked soap or working sinks before the pandemic.

In Fairfax County, Virginia, where schools last week completed the transition from fully remote to a mix of remote and in-person learning, surveys indicate many families in the state’s largest district may not want more time in classrooms.
The percentage of parents who say they prefer in-person learning over online has decreased in recent months, down to 47% this month from 56% in October, according to the district, which said parents have to feel prepared and safe sending their kids back.

“We are still working on looking at factors that may be able to help bring back additional students in-person in the weeks ahead,” a district spokesperson said via email.

In Ohio’s largest school district, Columbus, most students are back in classrooms part time under a hybrid schedule. Social distancing requirements that put capacity on school buses is one hurdle, and it doesn’t make sense to buy hundreds more buses, officials said.

Another hurdle, district treasurer Stanley Bahorek said, is uncertainty about what’s ahead and how schools might have to adapt.

“We’re in a situation where we don’t have a choice but to respond to an ever-changing environment,” Bahorek said. “And that’s the perspective that I hope people on the outside consider when they say, ‘Well, why don’t they just bring the kids back to school?’”
Helping HVAC fight Covid

Protecting students and staff from Covid-19 has made upgrading HVAC systems in education facilities a more urgent need.

Mike Kennedy
APR 02, 2021

Schools and universities seeking to make their facilities healthful learning environments that help combat the spread of Covid-19 should focus on their heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems—specifically the ventilation part.

“HVAC systems are critical to Covid-19 mitigation efforts due to their ability to control airborne pollutants and viruses and to distribute fresh outside air in classrooms,” the Learning Policy Institute says in a December 2020 paper.

The systems may be critical in the fight against Covid, but too many of them may not be up to the task. The obstacle for thousands of schools is the condition of their HVAC systems. Education institutions in general struggle with facility maintenance backlogs—problems that have been ignored or deferred because of inadequate funding and the priority given to more urgent crises. Keeping HVAC systems in shape is one of those items that get put on the back burner.

A June 2020 study by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that an estimated 41% of school districts need to update or replace the HVAC systems in at least half of their schools. That equates to about 36,000 schools.

“If not addressed, HVAC issues can result in health and safety problems,” the GAO says.

Covid-19 is a health and safety problem that descended into all schools whether or not their facilities had HVAC issues, but adjusting and upgrading HVAC systems to combat the virus will help schools provide a safer and more healthful learning environment for students.

The Covid relief package enacted by Congress in March allocates $130 billion in aid to K-12 schools, and some local districts may opt to use some of that to improve or replace their HVAC systems. But improving HVAC systems in all the facilities that need it will be costly.

The Learning Policy Institute estimates that the cost for new HVAC systems ranges between $30 and $50 per square foot.

“If half of the 36,000 buildings with sub-standard HVAC systems require upgrades and the remaining 50% require new ventilation systems, it would cost approximately $72 billion to ensure safe and healthy air quality in all schools and classrooms,” the institute says.
Healthy venting

For months, many classrooms sat empty because of the coronavirus, and concerns about HVAC systems and indoor air quality took a back seat to the effort to pivot to online instruction and make sure that students still could keep learning via the internet.

Now, as more school facilities are cleared to welcome students back from their pandemic-imposed exile, maintenance and operations staff should turn their attention to providing healthful learning spaces.

The Council of the Great City Schools is one of several organizations to provide guidance to help schools improve the air quality inside classrooms and other spaces.

“Improving air quality and increasing ventilation in our school buildings is one of the most important steps districts need to take to prepare school facilities for the return of students, teachers and staff during the Covid-19 crisis,” the Council says.

The Council has compiled recommendations to help schools maintain their ventilation systems to improve indoor air quality and lower the potential for Covid-19 circulating in a school building. Among them:

• Better filters. Return air filters in HVAC systems should be changed to those that have higher efficiency and trap more particles—the Council recommends a minimum MERV 13 filter (or equivalent) with the greatest depth allowed by the equipment, typically 2 inches where possible.

• Daily air flush out. Before teachers and staff arrive in the morning, maintenance workers should have the control settings and schedules for the ventilation systems and fans set so that they run for a minimum of two hours in occupied mode with the peak outside air rate.

• Open Windows. In facilities where there is no central HVAC system, doors and windows should be opened two hours before occupancy and at other times throughout the day.

• Regular inspections. Schools should conduct regularly scheduled preventive maintenance inspections on HVAC systems to ensure they are operating properly and providing adequate ventilation.


“For example, districts and schools can schedule incremental checkpoints to ensure plans for updating ventilation are going according to schedule and increase the frequency of changing ventilation filters,” the handbook says.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides additional recommendations to ensure that HVAC systems in schools are maximizing ventilation

• Set HVAC systems to bring in as much outdoor air as a system will safely allow.

• Disable demand-controlled ventilation controls that reduce air supply based on occupancy or
temperature. Doing this will keep the air supply constant throughout the day.

• For simple HVAC systems controlled by a thermostat, setting the fan control switch from “auto” to “on” will ensure that the HVAC system provides continuous air filtration and distribution.

• To enhance the effectiveness of open windows, use fans.

  “Fan placement is important and will vary based on room configuration,” the CDC says. “Avoid placing fans in a way that could potentially cause contaminated air to flow directly from one person to another.”

If schools are opening windows and using fans, they should take safety precautions, such as using fans with covers and having screens on windows.

• Consider portable high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) fan and filtration systems to enhance air cleaning (especially in higher-risk areas such as a nurse’s office or areas frequently inhabited by people with a higher likelihood of having Covid-19).

• Ventilation is especially important in areas where students may not be able to wear masks; if students have to eat indoors in a cafeteria, use methods such as opening windows, maximizing filtration as much as a system will allow, and using portable HEPA air cleaners.

• Make sure air filters are properly sized and within their recommended service life.

• Generate clean-to-less-clean air movement by evaluating and repositioning as necessary, supply louvers, exhaust air grilles, and damper settings.

• Consider using ultraviolet germicidal irradiation as a supplemental treatment to inactivate Covid-19, especially if options for increasing room ventilation and filtration are limited.
Some of the largest school districts across the country are planning to fully reopen schools in the fall for in-person instruction as more staff become inoculated against Covid-19 and a record level of federal funding is expected to bolster safety measures.

School districts from New York to California currently grappling with inconsistent in-person offerings are starting to lay out plans for full-time instruction with hopes of a less disruptive year ahead.

Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, says that schools should anticipate being open in the fall, according to a CDC spokesman.

“We should anticipate that come September 2021, that schools should be full-fledged in person and all of our children back in the classroom,” Dr. Walensky said in an ABC News interview on Wednesday.

The CDC and other federal authorities have pressed schools to reopen with the recommended safety protocols in place as soon as possible, as officials work to balance Covid-19 risks with the benefits of in-person learning for students and families.

In recent months, data has suggested that Covid-19 spread in the classroom is limited when the recommended safety guidance is strictly followed, and more resources are expected to become available for schools to implement Covid-19 testing systems and other safety measures.

Nearly 50 million students shifted to remote learning over a year ago when districts closed school buildings. The debate over when and how to reopen classrooms has been one of the most divisive battles of the pandemic and resulting in vastly difference procedures across the
nation’s more than 13,000 school districts. As districts began to offer in-person learning, hybrid options often meant kids went to the classroom just two or three days a week, and quarantine protocols sent them back home for days or weeks at a time.

Even in the fall, many schools will continue to use mitigation measures recommended by the CDC and offer remote-learning options for students whose families remain hesitant to send them back into the classroom, educators said. Superintendents expect to monitor infection rates, keeping hybrid of remote-learning plans in their back pockets in case the pandemic worsens.

“It could put a damper on everybody’s desire to fully reopen,” said Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of dozens of large urban school districts, about infection rates. “But our planning at the moment is tilted in favor of opening up five days a week for as many parents and students who want an in-person option.”

This week, the San Francisco Board of Education voted to offer in-person learning five days a week for students in the fall. District of Columbia Public Schools Chancellor Lewis Ferebee announced similar plans on Thursday, and leaders in nearby Fairfax County Public Schools in Virginia and Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland outlined their own goals last month. When asked Wednesday whether New York City’s public schools, the largest district in the nation, will open full time in the fall, Mayor Bill de Blasio said, “Based on what we know now? Absolutely.”

At the School District of Philadelphia, where district leaders have worked with the teachers union to reopen more classrooms this spring, Superintendent William Hite said they’re “working towards” a full-time in-person instruction plan for the fall.

A variety of variables could affect the feasibility of this goal, including the trajectory of the pandemic, the length of vaccine efficacy and whether more parents will opt their children back into classroom learning, he said. Abiding my distancing guidelines for schools with a large number of students could present another challenge.
“Nonetheless, we’re trying to problem-solve through all of those issues now with a view towards ensuring that we can get all the children back on a full-time basis in the fall,” said Dr. Hite, adding they plan to continue to follow health officials’ recommendations.

Evidence suggests that transmission in schools is limited when safety precautions such as masking and distancing are strictly in place, and in grade schools, teachers are more likely to be the primary transmitters of the virus than their students. Clusters of cases can still occur, however, and federal officials are currently hearing reports about clusters linked to day-care centers and youth sports, Dr. Walensky said during a White House press briefing on Wednesday.

The seven-day average for new Covid-19 cases is now just above 64,000 a day, the CDC said on Friday, as cases and hospitalizations have continued to tick upward but are down from their January peaks. Public-health authorities are currently racing to get as many shots in arms as possible, and many states are starting to expand eligibility to all adults.

“I want to be clear. As cases increase in the community, we expect cases identified in schools will also increase. This is not necessarily indicative of school-based transmission,” said Dr. Walensky said on Friday. Implementing CDC guidance for schools and reducing Covid-19 spread in the community can help limit or prevent transmission in schools, she added.

The CDC this week is sending out the $10 billion from the American Rescue Plan designated to help schools implement and bolster Covid-19 testing. “Being able to rapidly identify new cases among students will help us slow the spread of Covid-19,” Dr. Walensky said.

This week, the CDC announced close to 80% of all K-2 teachers, school staff and child-care workers have received at least one dose of the coronavirus vaccine. All 50 states and Washington, D.C., have now prioritized educators for their shots, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, which has tracked vaccine prioritizations.

Vaccines are only available for people ages 16 and older. But testing is under way to determine efficacy and safety for younger teenagers, which could possibly prompt expanded access before the summer.
FEMA Is Spending Billions on Pandemic Relief. How Schools Can Get More of It

By Mark Lieberman — April 14, 2021

So exactly what pandemic-related costs will FEMA reimburse school districts for?

Even as schools have devoted a growing pile of dollars to PPE, cleaning supplies, and other measures to keep COVID-19 out of buildings, it’s been hard to get a straight answer. Many districts have submitted claims only to see a fraction of their costs reimbursed, often with little or no explanation.

On top of that confusion, FEMA says it has contributed more than $21 billion in disaster relief through its public assistance program during the pandemic. How much have K-12 schools gotten so far?

Just under $26 million, according to an agency spokesperson.

But this week, officials with the Federal Emergency Management Agency offered some clarity. A FEMA spokesperson answered detailed questions about what the agency will and won’t pay for as the nation’s school districts continue to navigate one of the most costly and turbulent periods in their history.

Districts can’t get reimbursed for:

- Remote learning costs, including laptops, webcams, Wi-Fi hotspots, and online curriculum materials
- Cleaning supplies that were used and discarded between Sept. 15, 2020, and Jan. 21, 2021

But districts can get reimbursed for:

- Cleaning supplies, masks, desk shields, COVID-19 testing and screening tools, and PPE that a districts purchased in 2020 but continued to use after Jan. 21, 2021
- Cleaning supplies, masks, desk shields, COVID-19 testing and screening tools, and PPE purchased after Jan. 21, 2021

A ‘difficult’ agency to work with

Throughout the pandemic, district leaders have griped about conflicting and vaguely worded guidance from FEMA.
So far, K-12’s small sliver of the FEMA public assistance pie can be attributed in part to the agency’s decision last September under the Trump administration to stop reimbursing schools for the cost of masks and PPE. President Joe Biden has since reversed that policy, but this week’s updates from FEMA indicate the new policy isn’t fully retroactive to the start of the pandemic.

While the policy shift should help schools, district officials still have a pretty negative view of FEMA.

“No federal agency is more difficult to work with than FEMA,” said Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council for the Great City Schools, whose 77 big-city members’ pandemic-related costs could climb to tens of millions of dollars or more. “Their guidelines and rules are not clear; their responsiveness is appalling; and the timelines for reimbursement are excessive. I would rather work with almost anyone else but FEMA.”

Some school leaders also may not have realized they were eligible for FEMA reimbursement, or may not have the staff and resources to devote to filling out and tracking lengthy grant applications during an ongoing public health crisis.

**Unprecedented spending by schools**

The pandemic has disrupted almost every corner of school operations, and some K-12 advocates have suggested districts will eventually spend close to $25 billion on COVID-19-related costs. FEMA has urged districts to rely mostly on $195 billion in direct aid to K-12 schools passed by Congress during the pandemic as part of three economic stimulus packages to pay for those costs.

But districts say every dollar matters, particularly with efforts to help students who have struggled during the pandemic.

U.S. senators and state emergency managers in recent weeks have been ramping up pressure for FEMA to retroactively reimburse schools.

**Questions and answers on FEMA’s current reimbursement policy for schools:**

My district applied for millions of dollars in reimbursements, but the agency has only approved a small fraction of that sum so far. Why might that be?

Schools may have submitted requests for reimbursement for ineligible expenses, like the cost of remote learning. They might have submitted requests for reimbursement for the costs of work performed between Sept. 15 and Jan. 21, 2021, when FEMA’s policy did not permit reimbursing school districts for the cost of PPE and other COVID-19 mitigation efforts.

Schools would not be denied simply for requesting too much money, FEMA confirmed. The agency is not imposing a dollar limit on what K-12 districts can get back from eligible expenses. It’s also not currently imposing a deadline for submitting requests by a certain date.

According to the spokesperson, the agency’s public assistance program reimburses for “emergency protective measures that are necessary to eliminate or lessen immediate threats to life, public health, or safety.”
The agency has chosen a relatively narrow interpretation of that rule, excluding some costs of maintaining educational services for students during a public health emergency. My school district last fall purchased masks and other PPE for students and staff, in preparation for reopening school buildings. Students and staff are still using that equipment now. Can I get reimbursed for it?

Potentially, according to FEMA. The current policy says eligible expenses must be related to “work performed between Jan. 21 and Sept. 30” this year. An agency spokesperson confirmed that purchases made before those dates could be eligible for reimbursement if the items purchased are being used during that time frame.

My district bought laptops and tablets for students to help them learn remotely while school buildings were closed for safety reasons. Can I get reimbursed for those technology costs?

No. FEMA has specifically ruled out remote learning as an eligible expense. Furthermore, “increased costs of operating a facility or providing a service are generally not eligible even when directly related to the incident,” the FEMA spokesperson said.

My district bought cleaning supplies last October to prepare to reopen school buildings in November. We used up all of those cleaning supplies shortly after buildings reopened. Can I get reimbursed for the cost of those supplies?

Likely no. The FEMA policy says expenses must be tied to work performed after Jan. 21, 2021 in order to qualify. Since that cleaning effort happened during the period when FEMA’s policy for reimbursing schools was more strict, the district likely would not be eligible for FEMA assistance through the current iteration of the program.

My school district applied last year for reimbursement from FEMA, but I haven’t heard back about the status of my reimbursement. Does that mean I’m not eligible?

Not necessarily. “Any school for which funding is denied is provided a written explanation of that denial and afforded an opportunity to appeal and/or arbitrate that decision,” the FEMA spokesperson wrote. “If a written explanation was not provided, it is because funding has not been denied and is still under consideration.” The agency recommends schools get in touch with their local and state emergency management organizations for more details. Here’s a state-by-state list.

My district purchased masks for students and staff members to wear. Can I get reimbursed for all of those expenses, or only for the costs of masks for staff?

FEMA says masks and other personal protective equipment qualify as eligible expenses, regardless of who wears them: “school administrative personnel, staff, teachers, and students.”
The Post and Courier

Commentary: SC schools must use COVID relief money to make lasting changes
By John C. Read
April 29, 2021

Close to a half-billion dollars of federal and state COVID-19 recovery funds are expected to be flowing into the four tri-county school districts in the next two to three years. Will these funds be used merely to return our schools to where they were pre-COVID, or will they serve to transform the system in a way that assures the success of all children in our region?

In its award-winning series “Minimally Adequate” three years ago, The Post and Courier documented our state’s systemic failures to assure that all children are successful in our schools. Here in the tri-county area, organizations including Harvard, Clemson, Tri-County Cradle to Career Collaborative, Charleston Shared Future, the Avery Institute and the Charleston Forum have documented the extent to which disparities exist in every school attended by children of poverty and of color. The evidence is irrefutable that while these gaps have worsened during the pandemic, their root cause is to be found in an underlying, longstanding and at least implicit racial bias in how the system works.

This new funding will not be repeated, and the track record of our districts in making effective use of such one-time infusions is not impressive. District staffs prefer to keep their own counsel on how such funds should be spent, often turning to other educator consultants for advice. The results — fragmentation, more interventions, more remediation, something for everyone — have left these systems unchanged once the funds are spent.

School boards have the ultimate fiduciary responsibility for the effective use of these funds when they arrive, but none of these boards have had experience with funding of this magnitude. The Charleston County School Board is still new, finding its footing and could be entirely replaced in less than two years. The Berkeley County School District’s financial challenges are well-documented, and the Dorchester 2 board has shown little interest in the disparities found in its schools. Where, then, can the community turn for a different way to approach the use of these anticipated funds and the opportunity they present in order to effect lasting change?

The Council of the Great City Schools is composed of educators with long experience in such matters, and its advice to districts is strikingly different. It encourages districts to convene teams of stakeholders from across the district and region to create the plan for these funds. Educators should join with civic and business leaders, students, parents and community leaders and these cross-functional teams empowered to make these decisions. “Go slow to go fast” is the council’s advice such that schools not only open safely but that equity drives the application of these funds to where the need is greatest and with changes that are proven to work.

Within Charleston County, for example, a concentrated effort to transform the 14 “accelerator schools” should be a high-level objective for these funds, and the result: highly qualified, culturally competent teachers led by well-supported, world-class principals in these schools.
Stakeholder plans should result in a disproportionately large share of the money directed to these schools. In other regional schools where disparities are covered up by averaging, targeted support for students and families during and after school may be appropriate.

While these one-time dollars would secure the necessary talent for these schools, it will be the system changes that retain them — changes that free a principal and teaching staff from bureaucratic requirements that impede innovation. The principals at two of our public schools, Brentwood Elementary and Burns Elementary, have this flexibility and accountability. Their results, from student achievement to parental engagement and teacher satisfaction, demonstrate the value of providing resources and flexibility to capable educators and staying out of their way. The COVID-19 crisis has been devastating for all concerned, and educators at every level have exhibited heroic efforts on behalf of our children over these past months. Systemic failure is no one’s fault but everyone’s responsibility, and with public education already disrupted, it would be a moral failure to waste the opportunity for lasting change. School boards and civic and community leaders should heed this expert advice and open up the planning to broad-based community engagement across the region.

John C. Read, the former CEO of Tri-County Cradle to Career Collaborative, serves on the Charleston Forum board and as a member of Charleston Shared Future.
Angry White Parents vs. the Public School System

Children are still learning remotely in many cities and some parents are fed up – but the divide could fundamentally change urban public school systems.

By Lauren Camera
May 12, 2021, at 10:07 a.m.

Elizabeth Walsh, a Washington, D.C. mother of three elementary school aged children, is determined not to become one of those wealthy white families that abandons urban public schools when the going gets tough, as it’s been since the coronavirus shuttered schools for 50 million children more than a year ago.

But with the vast majority of students still learning virtually in cities across the country – and upwards of 90% in the nation's capital – she is hanging on by a thread.

"I don’t want to generalize, but where we live so many people already have it in their head, 'I'm just using the public school system until fifth grade or fourth grade and then I'm applying my kid out anyway,'" Walsh says about the majority white neighborhood nestled in the northwestern part of the city, where median home prices often exceed $2 million. "I believe in the public school system. I want my kids to go until twelfth grade."

"I think they’re going to get into a better college coming from DCPS than Sidwell Friends," she says, referencing one of the dozens of elite Washington-area private schools, in which she estimates at least 50% of the families in and around her neighborhood have already secured enrollment for their children.'

"We have the money to go to private school, but I’m not changing course," she says, unless, that is, her kids don’t go back in person this fall.

Walsh is trying to hold out, but anecdotal evidence from cities across the country suggests an uptick in wealthy parents pulling their kids from public schools. While the data lacks demographic details, enrollment in urban public schools is down roughly 4% since schools shuttered a year ago – in some cities enrollment is down by more than 30% in prekindergarten and early elementary school grades. And as white parents increasingly insist on in-person school, leading them to enroll in private options or move to the suburbs, at the same time that many parents of color are reluctant to send their children back in person, it's exacerbating the inequities that already plague urban public school systems.

Like so many other mayors and superintendents of big city school districts, Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser and DC Public Schools chancellor Lewis Ferebee have promised that schools will be open, in-person, five days a week next fall for families that want the option. But as it stands,
87% of fourth-grade students and 93% of eighth-grade students in Washington were still learning entirely remotely in March. And fall might be too late for some of the parents who have already left the public school system.

Walsh's three children get two and half hours of in-person instruction four days a week at their neighborhood public school. The in-person offering began mid-April.

"What the public schools have done to us has shown us that they are not necessarily going to be there for us," she says. "And what the private schools have shown people is like, 'No, no. You pay us a lot of money and we are going to be here for you. We are not going to leave you high and dry.'"

That's why Walsh has a back-up plan in case her children's school doesn't fully reopen next school year: Relocating to a house she and her husband own on Cape Cod.

"If something falls through, we will go up there next year and I will enroll my kids in Massachusetts, where they have in-person school," she says. "But I don't want to do that at all."

With the latest federal data showing that less than 30% of elementary and middle school students in cities are receiving in-person instruction, full time, five days a week, Walsh is on the verge of joining a chorus of parents pulling the plug on their urban school systems – a phenomenon that stands to financially handicap districts where enrollment is already down due to the pandemic and further segregate children in cities where white students and students of color are already separated by boundaries and feeder patterns.

"They know that if they're not able to make good on five days a week next year that parents will unenroll and that's going to hit them in the pocket," says Keri Rodrigues, co-founder and president of the National Parents Union who enrolled two of her children in Catholic school last year after mounting frustration with the learning options provided by their Boston-area public school district.

"Those October numbers we look for are going to be atrocious," she says, predicting that the disenrollment among white families will prove disastrous for urban public schools. "I think the systems have abused the trust of families across the country, and I don't think they realize what kind of damage the relationships have suffered during this period. There is a crisis of confidence."

**Urban School Districts Face Bigger Hurdles to Reopen**

As the rest of the country made strides in returning students to classrooms for in-person learning earlier this year, Walsh – and many parents like her – grew increasingly frustrated.
"That's about when I realized, Oh my gosh this isn't going to just be given to me," she says. "We have to actually start banging down doors. We have to march, we need to fight, we need to go crazy."

She helped organize a rally outside city hall in March and testified before a D.C. city council committee hearing outlining her concerns about the lack of in-person options.

To be sure, reopening for in-person learning has been significantly more challenging for urban school districts for a whole host of reasons.

Not only are many urban areas still grappling with higher community transmission rates, but their school facilities tend to be older, with poorer quality heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems. They often lack the extra indoor and outdoor space that their suburban and rural counterparts have to help keep children socially distanced. And, until recently, many of them also lacked the funding to provide personal protective equipment and sanitization, hire additional staff – including nurses, social workers, janitors and bus drivers – and establish testing and tracing programs, among the many other things the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends for a safe return to the classroom.

City school systems have made significant strides in returning more students to classrooms over the last three months, especially on the heels of the $140 billion in federal aid included in the most recent coronavirus stimulus package to help those reopening efforts. Those offering some type of in-person instruction jumped from from 57% in January to 79% in March, according to the latest federal data – though that could mean anything from open for in-person learning five days a week for all students to a hybrid model that allows students to be in person only one or two days a week.

But challenges unique to urban school districts are reflected in equal measure by the fact that only 38% of their elementary and middle schools were open full time for all students in March, according to the same federal data set, and only 26% of students enrolled in urban schools in grades four and eight were being taught in person, full time.

And in places like Washington, where the vast majority of students are still remote-only, parents who can are seeking other options.

"The pandemic is promoting another round of an old American story – that when public goods are scarce, the privileged are almost always able to use their money or social capital to get the best version of what is available," Conor Williams, fellow at the Century Foundation, says.

What's happening in Washington, he says, where he lives with his family, including two children who attend public school and are learning remotely, is just the latest example of parents with means – often, white parents – who have for decades self-segregated in the wealthiest neighborhoods in the city and its surrounding suburbs.

"You did it by purchasing a really good house in those spots or you paid private school tuition to get access to really high-quality education and then you left everyone else to whatever was
leftover and given to them as far as public resources," he says. "In this case, if in-person education is scarce, those who have the most ability to go find it will do it. I don't think you have to be a Marxist to see that the economic prerequisites of each individual family are what drives their access to more options of how they get public education."

Williams argues that the pandemic threw a lot of access to public goods back on individuals and their ability to pay for it, which is nothing new, he says, except for how public and toxic the school reopening debate has become.

"In the case of schools," he says, "that means you buy your way into or you social capital your way into in-person schooling wherever you can find it. That's not an option if you can't afford to leave D.C., if your job isn't remote, if fill in the blank."

But with an unclear path to reopening full time this late in the school year, some parents who have so far resisted such temptations – mostly white, upper- and middle-class mothers like Walsh – are now making moves, either enrolling their children in private or Catholic schools, or bolting to nearby suburbs where, right now, there is a full on scrum over houses that are closing upwards of $100,000 over asking with no contingencies.

Though some, including real estate agents working in Washington's highest-income zip codes, say the decisions to leave aren't singularly about the schools.

"The out-migration of city dwellers into the suburbs seems to be just a general concern as people have discovered that they want more space between them and their neighbors," Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, says. "I'm not sure how much that has to do with the schools or is an overarching issue people have."

"There is some exodus from the cities, but we don't know the extent of what that is and I'm not sure anyone understands how permanent this is," he says. "We've seen in-migration and out-migrations in previous years and it hasn't always been permanent. We're also not always sure who has moved and why they have moved, but this is an issue."

It's unclear how their decisions to leave will impact enrollment in places like Washington. As it stands, schools in the neighborhoods from which they're fleeing are some of the most overcrowded in the city, and the school district is in the process of reconfiguring the feeder system and adding a new school to create roughly 1,000 new seats.

Among urban school districts nationwide, enrollment for the current 2020-21 school year was down roughly 3% to 4%, mainly in the early learning years of pre-kindergarten through second grade – though city school systems reported much steeper drops in attendance.

Casserly says districts won't have a solid understanding of enrollment declines for the next school year until October, when schools begin reporting such data. Until then, he says, most urban school districts are looking to use summer camps, including academic, art, music and sports programs, to reengage students and their families and get a better sense of what they should anticipate in the fall.

"We don't know how big of an issue it is," he says. "Everyone is trying to keep close track of who is coming back and who has disappeared on them."
Racial Gaps in Reopening

Belying the issue of urban school districts’ hesitance to reopen for in-person learning amid outcries from mostly white and upper-middle class parents is a complex racial dynamic that underscores how the coronavirus pandemic was experienced by and has affected groups of people differently.

In large cities, where the population exceeds 250,000, the latest federal data shows that 42% of white students in fourth grade were learning remotely in March, compared to 58% of Black students, 59% of Hispanic students and 75% of Asian students. And among eighth grade students in urban schools, 48% of white students were learning remotely compared to 68% of Black students, 67% of Hispanic students and 81% of Asian students.

In some of the country’s biggest cities, those disparities are supercharged.

In New York City, for example, 37% of white students in fourth grade learned remotely compared to 66% of Black students, 61% of Hispanic students and 77% of Asian students. In Chicago – where 67% of students are Black, Hispanic or Asian – 39% of white students in fourth grade learned remotely compared to 75% of Black students, 84% of Hispanic students and 74% of Asian students.

The most egregious gap documented in the federal data shows 21% of white students in fourth grade learned remotely in Atlanta compared to 70% of Black students.

Some of the discrepancies can be explained by capacity, staffing and facilities woes – where even within one district, the schools in poorer neighborhoods, which tend to enroll more students of color, aren’t as equipped as schools in more affluent neighborhoods. A big part of the explanation is also that more families of color are choosing to stick with virtual learning, even when they have the option of returning to classrooms – both because their communities have been disproportionately impacted by the coronavirus and because, against the backdrop of a national reckoning over racism and systemic inequality, they say they never felt safe in those schools even prior to the pandemic.

That’s the case in Washington, where Ferebee says the majority of families are, in fact, receiving education for their children the way they prefer.

"You have in public, these angry, vaccinated white parents yelling about often unvaccinated teachers in an urban setting, often teachers of color, about how they need to get back to school to serve my kid because my kid is hurting," Williams says. "The point is that the reopening debate makes it vivid that when these demands are being made, and they're often being made in the guise of equity, the people who are benefiting are not the people who are being talked about. The people who are benefiting are the angry white parents."

Education Secretary Miguel Cardona has addressed this disparity in recent weeks – though he’s proposed little to nothing concrete to tackle it directly.

The pandemic, he’s said, "served to sharpen our swords for the real battle, to fight boldly to address inequities that are in our system. It’s not about reopening schools; it’s about making them better than they were before the pandemic."
What to Expect Next School Year

While Black, Hispanic and Asian parents are still more likely to want to continue with virtual learning due to the fact that their communities have been harder hit by the virus, the share of each demographic that feels that way is shrinking, largely due to continued messaging from the CDC that in-person school doesn’t increase community spread and that, in most cases, children are less likely to be infected by the coronavirus in school than out of school.

Educators, too, are feeling more confident about welcoming students back into the classroom now that the majority of teachers are vaccinated.

Organizations tracking school reopenings are reporting each week that more districts are offering in-person learning five days a week and fewer and fewer offering virtual-only learning. And more good news: The FDA approved coronavirus vaccines for children 12 years old just this week.

Yet urban school districts are far from in the clear. They still face space constraints, older facilities and higher than average transmission rates in pockets of their communities. Now they’re also bracing for new strains of the virus, including the B. 117 variant that originated in the UK, which is driving up infection rates in children in ways the original strain didn’t. In doing so, schools and daycares are closing once again in parts of Colorado, Maine, Maryland and Michigan.

And for the city school systems that have yet to fully reopen, the confluence of remaining challenges and potential future complications is fueling the very real notion that they may not be able to offer in-person learning, five days a week for every family that wants that option this coming fall.

There’s been little to no public acknowledgement of that possibility from school leaders, but it’s the type of unspoken understanding that parents say they’re picking up on from casual conversations with teachers, from the options included in reopening surveys or from reading between the lines of monthly check-ins from principals and reopening announcements.

"If they can't even say assuredly that, ‘Yes we are going to be open five days a week in the fall, and it might look different with masks, but we are going to be open and you will have some stability’ – if we're not hearing that now, parents are making moves," Rodrigues says. "Parents are over the instability, they're over the political back and forth. They need stability for their kids, and they're terrified about what this means for long-term learning loss."

As for Walsh, she filed the reenrollment forms for her children to remain in their neighborhood public elementary school last month.

"I plan to stay public," she says. "A lot of people don't. I believe in it. It's going to work. But I need it to work faster."
Teachers union chief calls for full return to school this fall

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, says instruction should be in-person, five days a week.

By Laura Meckler

May 13, 2021 at 4:38 p.m. EDT

The president of the nation’s second-largest teachers union is calling for full-time in-person school this fall, a move that could smooth the way back after a year where teachers often resisted a return to classrooms.

“There is no doubt: Schools must be open. In person. Five days a week,” Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, said in a speech Thursday delivered via YouTube and other streaming services. “Given current circumstances, nothing should stand in the way of fully reopening our public schools this fall and keeping them open.”

Weingarten has long said that she wants school to operate with teachers and students physically present, though many of her union’s members have resisted. Her call was greeted with skepticism by some who see unions as having been overly cautious or outright obstinate.

Union leaders have generally said schools cannot open in a pandemic unless it is safe, and the school year has been marked by endless disputes over what is required for safety.

But with the Biden administration pushing hard for a full return to classrooms, and with coronavirus vaccinations widely available and districts across the country promising weary parents they will reopen fully this fall, it appears that opinion among teachers is shifting. The largest teachers union in the country, the National Education Association, suggested Thursday that it agrees with the AFT.

“NEA supports school buildings being open to students for in-person instruction in the fall,” said a statement from NEA President Becky Pringle. She did not specify whether that would be five days a week, but a spokeswoman later said NEA does support a full-time return to in-person learning.

In her statement, Pringle also suggested unions were responsible for making sure schools open safely. “Educators will continue to lead in making sure each school has what it needs to fully re-open in a safe and just way and to ensure the resources exist to meet the academic, social and emotional needs of all students,” the statement said.
Many school districts have offered students at least part-time options this spring, with very few still completely remote. Many districts are using hybrid systems, in which students are in the building only a day or two a week, or where in-person learning is not available to all students. Federal data show that as of March, nearly half of schools were not yet open full time for all students.

Districts in the South and Midwest were much more likely to be fully in-person than those in the Northeast and West. And students of color were more likely to be attending remotely than White students.

Nonetheless, districts across the country have promised that they will reopen full time this fall, and Weingarten’s speech suggests her local chapters will not try to fight that.

“We have been planning for fully reopening in the fall for months,” said Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, which represents urban districts. “We welcome the unions in the ongoing planning.”

Weingarten, who is close to the White House, also puts her union more fully in line with President Biden, who has pushed for schools to reopen. Asked about the union leader’s comments, White House press secretary Jen Psaki replied, “We agree.”

Weingarten said Thursday that her union will run a $5 million “back-to-school for everyone” campaign this summer to persuade teachers and families to return. “The United States will not be fully back until we are fully back in school. And my union is all in,” she said.

Weingarten announced that the AFT executive council had endorsed her call for a return to school, as well as a vision for how to improve education as the system begins to recover from the pandemic. Nonetheless, some of her members may resist.

One teacher addressed Weingarten on the AFT Facebook page: “Last I knew, the pandemic did not magically disappear. Please do not speak for the rank and file who love our union but who are NOT `all in’ for returning to five days a week.”

In her speech, Weingarten defended previous union resistance to going back to classrooms this year, accusing critics of scapegoating and vilifying teachers and blaming them for “problems outside their control.” But she said conditions have changed since then.

Keri Rodrigues, president of the National Parents Union, a group that often opposes teachers unions, supports full reopening but gives AFT little credit for making it happen.

“Teachers unions have fought science every step of the way on the grass-roots level,” she said. “I think Randi is reacting to the fact that she is well aware that parents and families are tired of the endless uncertainty about whether or not schools are going to reopen five days a week next year and have made it clear that if they do not, they will be seeking other options.”

Weingarten said that a return to in-person school is “not risk free” but that those risks can be managed with vaccination and other mitigation measures, including the use of masks and maintaining three feet of distance between students. She said new federal money can help schools implement a variety of protective measures.
Vaccination has been the game changer, she said. The union’s data show that 89 percent of its members are fully vaccinated or want to be. And she noted that the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine has been authorized for use in children ages 12 to 15.

She called on districts to reduce class sizes — something teachers have long supported — to maintain three feet of distance, as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends. She suggests that school systems work this summer to find more space to keep classes smaller.
Can Schools Mandate Covid-19 Vaccines for Children? What We Know

Schools and districts can’t require Covid-19 vaccines for students, but states can

By Yoree Koh
June 11, 2021 8:00 am ET

Many education officials, public-health officials and parents believe that vaccinating children against Covid-19 will play a key role in resuming normal life in time for in-person learning in the fall. That stance has led some parents to wonder: Will K-12 students be mandated to receive the vaccine to be allowed on campus this fall? Children as young as 12 years old are now eligible to receive the Covid-19 vaccine from Pfizer Inc. and BioNTech SE. Moderna Inc. said Thursday it has asked U.S. health regulators to authorize the use of its Covid-19 shot in adolescents ages 12 to 17, setting up the potential availability of a second vaccine option for adolescents.

About 23% of youths 12 to 15 years old have received at least one dose of the Pfizer vaccine since U.S. health regulators cleared it for use among that age group last month, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

About 51% of people are in favor of mandating vaccines for middle-school students, 56% for high-school students and 61% for college students, according to a Gallup poll of more than 3,500 adults conducted in May.

About 53% of parents of children between the ages of 12 and 15 said they plan to have their child vaccinated. The same percentage of parents of children under 12 said they planned to have their children vaccinated once the green light is given.

State policies regarding vaccinations will play a key role in whether schools can require Covid-19 vaccinations in a way similar to how many require shots for infectious diseases such as measles.

Can schools mandate Covid-19 vaccines?

Schools and school districts generally don’t have the authority to mandate student vaccines.
But other authorities can: namely, state legislatures or health officials acting under legislative authority, said Dorit Rubinstein Reiss, a public-health law professor at the University of California Hastings College of the Law.

The one exception is New York City, where a 2018 court case over flu vaccinations implies that city officials can likely require student vaccines in addition to the ones authorized by the state.

“This is an area that is already simply pretty highly regulated,” said Ms. Reiss.

Some states such as California allow state health departments to add other vaccines to those required by law. But the health department has never exercised that allowance, said Ms. Reiss. Every one of the 10 vaccines on California’s approved list has been added through the state legislature, she said.

**Have state lawmakers shown an interest in mandating the Covid-19 vaccines for K-12 students?**

Not really, and that isn’t surprising, according to Ms. Reiss. For starters, the vaccine has only been approved for use in children 12 and up. So making an argument that a vaccine is necessary might prove hard if only half the school population can receive it, said Ms. Reiss. Lawmakers are unlikely to push for a mandate until the vaccine is approved for use by all school-age children. Another reason is that all three Covid-19 vaccines are currently approved under an emergency-use authorization, said Ms. Reiss. While that status doesn’t necessarily preclude a mandate, it does weaken the legal standing.

Oklahoma became the first state to pass legislation blocking K-12 vaccine requirements. The bill, signed by Republic Gov. Kevin Stitt late last month, also forbids schools from implementing a mask mandate on unvaccinated students. Similar bills prohibiting schools to require the vaccine are making their way through Michigan and Pennsylvania legislatures.

**Do school districts want the Covid-19 vaccine to be mandated?**
Many are keeping quiet on the issue. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, who has authority over schools, indicated last week that he isn’t keen on a vaccine mandate.

“I think when we get in the business of mandating, we create conflict that we don’t need in this,” said Mr. de Blasio. He added that increasing vaccinations by educating about their effectiveness would be better.

Los Angeles Unified School District Superintendent Austin Beutner said vaccines should be made mandatory once they have been proven to be safe and effective.

“I would expect that in the not too distant future—I don’t know if it’s weeks, months or hopefully not years—the state would mandate it. Why would we treat Covid differently than we treat measles and mumps? It doesn’t make sense to me,” said Mr. Beutner.

Mr. Beutner, head of the country’s second-largest school district, said that he has discussed a potential mandate with state legislators for months and that when the politics around the topic are put aside, many agree that the vaccine should be required. There are differing views on when would be the right time to implement it, he said.

Mr. Beutner is stepping down from his job at the end of the month.

Nearly 50 urban school districts, including New York City, Los Angeles, Cleveland and Detroit, are offering vaccinations to students and families at school buildings, according to the Council of the Great City Schools.

What do teachers say?

The National Education Association, the country’s largest teachers union, said it doesn’t have a national position, and the American Federation of Teachers, the second-largest teachers union, said it isn’t pushing for vaccination to be required. Randi Weingarten, the group’s president, has said it is important to convince people of the vaccine’s efficacy to overcome hesitancy.

How effective are the Covid-19 vaccines among children?
The results of a Pfizer-BioNTech study of 2,260 adolescents found that the two-dose shot was 100% effective at protecting against symptomatic Covid-19 in 12- to 15-year-olds. So far, researchers haven’t found evidence that the vaccines pose any additional or different risks to children versus adults. The most common side effects of the vaccine, according to the CDC, are flulike symptoms, such as fever, muscle aches and chills.

**Do school vaccine mandates work?**

Yes, according to Dr. Paul Offit, director of the Vaccine Education Center at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia. Take the case of measles, the first vaccine to be mandated at schools in some states. According to a 2003 paper in the American Medical Association’s Journal of Ethics, “Evidence showed that states with school immunization laws had rates of measles 40-51% lower than states without such laws.” Such findings led to more state mandates and strict enforcement.

“Because of those mandates we ultimately eliminated measles from this country” for a time, said Dr. Offit.

Every state requires children to be vaccinated to attend school, with inoculations for mumps, measles and rubella, as well as polio and diphtheria among the most common. But there are exemptions. Six states—West Virginia, Mississippi, New York, Maine, California and Connecticut—allow only medical exemptions.

Forty-four states and the District of Columbia grant religious exemptions, and 15 states allow philosophical exemptions, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

**What about colleges?**

Hundreds of colleges and universities—both public and private—are requiring students to be vaccinated to participate in on-campus learning this fall. The legal restrictions that bind K-12 schools don’t always apply because most public universities have self-governing powers from the state, and private universities
generally aren’t subject to state regulations, said Ms. Reiss. But the self-governing powers of public universities usually aren’t strong enough to override state legislation. If states say that public universities can’t make the Covid-19 vaccine a condition for attendance, such as in the case of Oklahoma and Utah, then the universities’ powers might be limited, said Ms. Reiss.

**What’s next?**

Some public-health experts and pediatricians caution that it might be prudent to wait until more data is available before making the Covid-19 vaccine a requirement. Danny Benjamin, a professor of pediatrics at Duke University, said he would want “maximum information” on the vaccine’s efficacy and mortality rates on a much larger scale than provided through the initial trials. “We’re really early in the life cycle of mandating it,” said Dr. Benjamin.

Dr. Benjamin, whose four children have all received the vaccine including two who were part of the initial trials, said that given the hesitancy regarding vaccines it is best not to rush to mandates. Instead, encouraging vaccinations through incentives and education would be better, he said.
Schools Push to Get Students Vaccinated Before the Start of Academic Year

Health experts say the time is now for students 12 and up to get vaccinated against Covid-19 in time for school reopening

By
Aydali Campa
July 12, 2021 5:30 am ET

With the start of school only weeks away in some parts of the country, schools, school districts and some teachers unions are pushing to get students vaccinated to ensure they are inoculated against the spread of Covid-19 when classes fully reopen in the fall.

Sixty-three percent of public schools were open full-time, in-person for all students by May, while 2% offered remote learning exclusively, according to data released Thursday from the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences.

Many districts are planning on reopening in the fall for in-person instruction, although some will still also offer remote learning.

“The time is now” for vaccinations, said Jim Blumenstock, the senior vice president of pandemic response and recovery at the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials. “The school year is right around the corner, depending on [the] part of the country.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Friday recommended that students, teachers and staff who aren’t fully vaccinated should continue to wear masks indoors. It also urged schools to reopen in person while maintaining 3-foot social distancing and encouraging more families to get vaccinated.
In May, the Food and Drug Administration authorized the vaccine from Pfizer Inc. and partner BioNTech SE for people as young as 12 years old. So far, about 65% of people ages 12 or older have received at least one dose of the vaccine, and 56% have had both, according to data from the CDC.

Schools generally can’t mandate that students get vaccines, though other authorities like state legislatures can. Given those limitations, some school districts have turned to community campaigns, joining with local health agencies and clinics, and state and local governments to increase the number of vaccinated people ages 12 and older.

The Phoenix Union High School District, which ended the school year with two-thirds of its students still attending school remotely, joined with local elementary school districts to host a pop-up vaccination event in 15 schools in June. They vaccinated 3,100 people, said Phoenix Union chief of staff Isela Rivas.

The district also joined with Lyft to provide free transportation for families to and from the sites in Phoenix. They hosted another event on Friday and Saturday, and plan to host another event in late July. District students have the option of returning to school in person or remotely on Aug. 2.

More broadly, the White House partnered inner-city school districts with retail pharmacies to help provide staffing at pop-up vaccine clinics based on school campuses, said Ray Hart, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of about 75 of the largest urban school districts.

The School District of Philadelphia enlisted students for Philly Teen Vaxx campaign, aimed at educating families about the vaccine and providing accessible opportunities for them to get the vaccine. They have hosted 10 vaccination events so far with at least 150 shots administered at each event.

Philadelphia Schools Medical Officer Barbara Klock said setting up vaccination sites alone isn’t enough. Educating families and earning their trust is key to making
families feel comfortable with getting the shot, she said. Students in the district made almost 40 TikTok videos promoting vaccination events and educating viewers on the vaccine. The effort is partly aimed at countering misinformation about the vaccine.

“Best way to get the message across is from other teens,” said Dr. Klock. The district plans to have all students return to school in person on Aug. 31.

Not everyone is on board with the efforts. More than 80 protesters showed up at a district vaccination event in May hosted by Ridgefield High School in Washington state, said Joe Vajgrt, the Ridgefield School District communications manager. They claimed that the district was administering shots without parental consent and pushing families to get the shot.

Mr. Vajgrt denied both accusations. “Our student council was motivated to put on an event so our district supported the idea,” he said.

So far, the district has administered more than 500 vaccine doses.

The Chicago Teachers Union last week proposed that the school district develop a program with the goal of vaccinating 80% of students 12 and older by Oct. 1. The union asked the district to hold vaccination events at school buildings and coordinate vaccine home visits, according to the proposal.

In partnership with the Chicago Department of Public Health, the district will offer vaccinations at three school sites during the day every week through the end of the summer starting Monday.

The district plans to continue hosting vaccination events in various sites, which have contributed to the more than 1,400 vaccinations administered since May, according to a district announcement in early July.
“The power of doing it at schools is that our schools rest inside the local communities,” said Dr. Hart of the Council of the Great City Schools. “Our schools are comfortable places for our parents and the families in our communities.”
CHARLESTON, S.C. (WCSC) - With just over a week before classes are back in session for Charleston County students, the county’s school board on Monday outlined some of the latest protocols it has established to keep COVID-19 from spreading.

A provision signed into the state’s budget prevents school districts from mandating that students wear face masks in the classroom this fall by restricting districts from using state funds to enforce such a mandate. District Superintendent Dr. Gerrita Postlewait says that poses challenges because the district can’t separate out funding sources to get around the prohibition.

“The conundrum is clear: if we follow some of the very, very clear medical advice we’re being given, we’re out of compliance with a couple of different provisions of the state laws,” she said.

The board also heard a legal update during a special called meeting to ensure the district is complying with the various state and federal rules regarding masks.

Meanwhile, the district says the removal of plexiglass barriers that were in place during the last school year is nearly complete. District officials have said individual students may have the plexiglass barriers at their desks upon request.

District officials are also changing the policy for quarantining for people who have come into close contact with those who test positive. Last year, the district’s protocol called for a 14-day quarantine for high-risk sports cases. But since the district cannot require masks, its new protocol will be to implement quarantining for 14 days for all close contacts based on recommendations from MUSC and the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control.

For in-person events, the protocols will allow three-person family pods with three-foot spacing between them.

The district is hoping to keep the number of students who may need to quarantine to a minimum by keeping the same groups of students together when possible.

“There is some, some sense of relaxation with what has happened with COVID. We really need to engage hard on that to keep as many of the same students together as possible so that if...
there is a positive case issue, we’re quarantining the least number of students that we have to,” Jeff Borowy, the district’s chief operating officer, said.

The board also voted 8-0 to approve a contract with the Council of the Great City Schools for board training in an effort to make changes to its priorities and meeting structure.

During the Committee of the Whole meeting immediately before the special called board meeting, the board heard annual reports from the leaders of the boards of the constituent districts that make up the larger district. Several of those leaders stressed the need for improved communication between the larger board and the constituent boards, outlining instances in which they felt out of the loop on issues happening in their jurisdictions.

Pamela Jouan-Goldman, the chair of Constituent District 2, which encompasses much of the area around Mt. Pleasant, voiced concerns about frequent redistricting, saying some schools were faced with seeing their attendance boundaries redrawn nearly every other year due to the community’s growth.

Diana Yarborough, the chair of Constituent District 20, which includes the Charleston Peninsula, said her district’s school-aged child population has been flat while other areas have grown, adding many families leave the area because of what she said were poor performing schools.

Yarborough called for a number of changes, including sharing middle and high schools with West Ashley and Mt. Pleasant to make educational offerings more equitable.

Postlewait also gave a number of updates on back-to-school efforts and on enrollment projections ahead of the new school year. Currently, the district is projecting 44,654 students will be enrolled.

She also pointed out that as of 10 a.m. Monday there are 26 teacher vacancies but said that number is not concerning for her.

The district has a back-to-school hotline that will be open from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. each weekday next week. Also, to help families who may not speak English, the district has created the Office of Translation and Interpretation Services.
More Schools Are Doing Systemic COVID Testing. Will It Work?
Sarah D. Sparks,
August 10, 2021

Nearly 70 percent of the 74 big city school systems in a tracker maintained by Education Week and the Council of the Great City Schools require some form of virus testing for students and staff. But those strategies vary, with some testing only targeted populations, some making tests optional, and some offering them at different durations.

In New York City, for example, schools have tested samples of students on a biweekly basis. Pennsylvania has offered weekly “pooled testing” to schools, using COVID relief aid to test whole classrooms of students with one kit, pulling students out for subsequent individual swabs if their classroom tests positive. Los Angeles Unified has an ambitious $350 million weekly testing effort that involves two plane trips a day to fly samples to a northern California lab.

But many schools have not widely adopted testing strategies, citing concerns about staffing shortages, taking students away from classroom time, and the availability of supplies.

The White House plan may help address the supply issue by using the Defense Production Act to help produce nearly $2 billion in rapid point-of-care and over-the-counter COVID tests for use in homes, schools, and community settings. Biden’s plan also calls for distribution of free, at-home tests at food banks and community health centers, which provide care to low-income and uninsured families.

Some schools have also struggled to secure parental consent for regular student testing, as Education Week reported in March. Testing efforts are weakened when fewer students participate, disease experts have said, and some parents are concerned about privacy, comfort, or the inconvenience of quarantines if their child has an asymptomatic case.

Pressure to vaccinate more teachers and school staff

The Biden administration has long linked its teacher vaccination efforts with its push to open schools for in-person learning. It prioritized teachers, child-care workers, and school staff for early doses of COVID-19 vaccines before they were available to the general population in most states, and Biden has encouraged schools to sponsor on-site clinics for employees, eligible students, and community members.
As of Sept. 7, two states and Puerto Rico have ordered all teachers to get vaccinated, according to an Education Week tracker. Another seven states and the District of Columbia have said teachers must get vaccinated or undergo regular testing. Nine states have taken the opposite approach by prohibiting teacher vaccine requirements, the tracker shows.

“We need to do more,” Biden said of vaccination requirements. “This is not about freedom or personal choice. It’s about protecting yourself and those around you.”
Parents support school mask mandates more than required vaccines, a study finds

By Sheryl Gay Stolberg  
• Aug. 11, 2021

American parents of school-age children are more supportive of school mask requirements than mandatory coronavirus vaccines, according to a new survey. It found that nearly two-thirds of those parents want schools to insist on masks for students, teachers and staff members who do not have their shots.

The survey, released on Wednesday by the Kaiser Family Foundation, offers a window into the thinking of U.S. parents at the outset of another complicated school year. Debates over mask mandates are raging, the Biden administration is making a push for young people to get inoculated, and the Delta variant is sending more young people to the hospital with Covid-19.

The survey found that 63 percent of parents wanted masks required in schools for people who are unvaccinated. But parents’ views about vaccinating their children are complicated, the survey found, and tend to fall along the partisan lines that have shaped the discussion around vaccinating adults.

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine received emergency authorization from the Food and Drug Administration in May for use in people aged 12 and older. But more than half of the parents of school-age children said they still did not think schools should require it.

The Kaiser research, part of an ongoing study of public attitudes toward Covid-19 vaccination, is based on a nationally representative sample of 1,259 parents with a child under 18 in their household. Conducted July 15 to Aug. 2, it found that one in five parents of children ages 12 to 17 said their child would “definitely not” get vaccinated.

“Despite controversy around the country about masks in schools, most parents want their school to require masks of unvaccinated students and staff,” Drew Altman, the foundation’s chief executive, said in a statement. “At the same time, most parents don’t want their schools to require their kids get a Covid-19 vaccine despite their effectiveness in combating Covid-19.”

School officials around the country say they are deeply concerned about their ability to keep classrooms open this year, and many schools are promoting vaccination and even running vaccination clinics. But persuading parents to vaccinate their children is an uphill battle, educators say.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that just 30 percent of students ages 12 to 15 are fully vaccinated; the rate is 80 percent among U.S. adults over 65.

“The biggest challenge is just making sure that folks are understanding that the vaccines are safe and that the vaccines mitigate the effects” of Covid-19, said
Raymond C. Hart, the executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, which represents large urban school districts.

The Kaiser study reflected that challenge. An overwhelming majority — 88 percent — of parents whose children were unvaccinated said they were “very” or “somewhat” concerned that not enough is known about the long-term effects of Covid-19 vaccines in children, and 79 percent expressed concern about serious side effects.

Nearly three-quarters of the parents said they worried the vaccines could hurt their child’s fertility, even though the C.D.C. has found no evidence of that.

Attitudes toward vaccination broke down along racial, ethnic and partisan lines.

Hispanic and Black parents were more likely than white parents to cite concerns that reflect access barriers to inoculation, including not being able to get a vaccine from a trusted place or believing that they might have to pay for it. The survey found that about two-thirds of Democratic parents favored mask and vaccine mandates, while more than three-quarters of Republicans opposed them.
Education Commissioner Richard Corcoran has recommended both districts be punished, which could include withholding funds or even removal of leaders from office.

School districts in Broward and Alachua counties could face penalties — including the removal of leaders from office — after the Florida Board of Education determined Tuesday they are in violation of state rules on mask mandates.

In an emergency meeting, the board ruled that the district’s policies violate rules issued by the Florida Department of Health enacted to enforce Gov. Ron DeSantis’ executive order that districts allow parents to decide whether their children wear masks in schools to protect against COVID-19.

Broward and Alachua are only allowing mask opt outs if students provide a medical excuse signed by a physician or therapist.

Education Commissioner Richard Corcoran said medical opt-outs are not acceptable.

“Every school board member and superintendent has the duty to comply with the law, whether they agree with it or not,” Corcoran said during the meeting, held via conference call.

Board chair Tom Grady outlined the potential consequences the districts could face.

“That may include withholding funds from the district — although I would add a footnote that I do not want to withhold funds in a way that would harm any child in any district,” Grady said.

“It may involve withholding salaries. It may involve removing officers. It may involve reviewing district conduct. It may involve public records requests to see how monies are being spent within the district, including whether they’re being spent for public relations or political purposes contrary to their constitutional mandate. It would include enhanced reporting and accountability to this board.
“And I would also add a report to the Legislature with recommendations for the Legislature … to take whatever additional steps may be necessary.”

During the nearly three-hour meeting, board members grilled Broward interim Superintendent Vickie Cartwright and Alachua County Public Schools Superintendent Carlee Simon.

Cartwright argued the regulations were broad and did not expressly prohibit the district’s strategy of requiring a medical professional’s approval to “opt out” of wearing masks.

“The language is very general and absent of specificity. So when we’re looking at this, we believe we are in compliance because we are providing provisions for parents who have a medical reason for their child not to wear a face covering to go ahead and follow a process,” she said.

She also defended the district’s position by outlining the alarming COVID-19 conditions in Broward County, including increasing hospitalizations of children.

Cartwright has only been in the interim post three weeks after the resignation Robert Runcie, who is fighting a perjury charge related to a state investigation of the 2018 Parkland school shooting.

Cartwright also reiterated the argument she made in a letter to Corcoran last week: The district is facing a lawsuit from parents of students with disabilities and severe medical conditions who argue they would not be able to send their children to school safely unless masks are mandatory.

“When we start taking away the rights of students with disabilities — because we’re unable to provide them with a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment — that is something that is very alarming to us,” said Cartwright, referencing federal laws that protect students with disabilities’ access to education.

Simon said Alachua is following the rules — noting the policy allows parents to use the HOPE scholarship for bullied students if they disagree with the mask rules. Simon also said her district’s policy is in place due to the county being in a state of emergency.

“At this point, we know that COVID is being brought into our school. We have cases where parents have tested positive and they bring their children to school. We know that children are showing systems, have been tested and have been dropped off to school while parents are waiting for test results,” Simon said.

Corcoran, meanwhile — pushed back against the Biden administration’s efforts to head off any punishments that involve funding. The administration has promised to backfill districts if they lose money — something Corcoran believes amounts to hypocrisy, because the U.S. Department of Education refused to allow the state to use a portion of its education stimulus money to award bonuses to teachers.
“It's no coincidence that it's Florida,” Corcoran said. “I mean, they talk more about our governor and the state in their press conferences than any other state. We wonder why.”

Grady asked Cartwright about a call she received from President Joe Biden. He inquired whether the president asked “about the emotional well-being of kids who may be unable to wear masks to school.”

“He was asking about how the community was responding to the decision that the board had made, and did we have a lot of people speaking out against face coverings,” Cartwright said. “The response that I provided to him was that, overwhelmingly, the amount of communication that was sent to our school board was in support of face coverings.”

Grady also asked about a call Cartwright received from U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardon that was set up by the Council of Great City Schools. Cartwright said, “I'm not really sure what the bearing is of that conversation on today's discussion.”

State Agriculture Commissioner Nikki Fried called in to deliver testimony during the public comment portion of the meeting. She’s a Democrat looking to unseat DeSantis in next year’s gubernatorial election.

“I will continue to work with the White House to refund schools and make sure history records your unconstitutional partisan decisions,” Fried said. “I assure you that if you remove these duly elected constitutional officers, it will not hold up in the courts.”

The emergency conference call was held the night before the Education Board will convene for its regularly scheduled meeting in Miami. Also Wednesday, the Miami-Dade County school board plans to discuss its own mask policy for when classes begin next week.
As Childhood Covid Cases Spike, School Vaccination Clinics Are Slow Going

Districts are heeding President Biden’s call to host pop-up vaccination clinics. But promoting vaccines is politically difficult, and persuading parents isn’t easy.

By Sheryl Gay Stolberg
Aug. 20, 2021

CHEYENNE, Wyo. — There were no cheery signs urging “Get your Covid-19 vaccine!” at the back-to-school immunization clinic at Carey Junior High School last week. In the sun-drenched cafeteria, Valencia Bautista sat behind a folding table in a corner, delivering a decidedly soft sell.

Hundreds of 12- and 13-year-olds streamed through with their parents to pick up their fall schedules and iPads. Ms. Bautista, a county public health nurse, wore a T-shirt that said “Vaccinated. Thanks, Public Health” and offered vaccines against ailments like tetanus and meningitis, while broaching the subject of Covid shots gently — and last.

By day’s end, she had 11 takers. “If they’re a no, we won’t push it,” she said.

Vaccination rates among middle and high school students need to rise drastically if the United States is going to achieve what are arguably the two most important goals in addressing the pandemic in the country right now: curbing the spread of the highly infectious Delta variant and safely reopening schools. President Biden told school districts to hold vaccination clinics, but that is putting superintendents and principals — many of whom are already at the center of furious local battles over masking — in a delicate position.

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is authorized for people 12 and older, but administering it to anyone younger than 18 usually requires parental consent, and getting shots into the arms of teenagers has proved harder than vaccinating adults. Only 33 percent of 12- to 15-year-olds and 43 percent of 16- and 17-year-olds are fully vaccinated, according to federal data, compared with 62 percent of adults.

Yet some school districts offering the shots, along with pediatrics practices, appear to be making progress: Over the past month, the average daily number of 12- to 15-year-olds being vaccinated rose 75 percent, according to Biden administration officials.

As the school year begins, many superintendents do not know how many of their students are vaccinated against Covid-19; because it is not required, they do not ask.

It is no surprise that nurses like Ms. Bautista are circumspect in their approach. In Tennessee, the state’s top immunization leader, Dr. Michelle Fiscus, said she was fired last month after she distributed a memo that suggested some teenagers might be eligible for vaccinations without their parents’ consent.
In Detroit, where county health officials have been running school-based clinics all summer, nurses discovered “strong hesitancy” when they made more than 10,000 calls to parents of students 12 and older to ask whether their children would get the shots and answer questions about them, said the deputy superintendent, Alycia Meriweather. More than half said no.

In Georgia, Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools held their back-to-school clinic at the mall — a “neutral location,” said M. Ann Levett, the superintendent. She is also planning school-based clinics, she said, despite some political pushback and “Facebook chatter” accusing her of “pushing the vaccine on kids.”

Ms. Levett said she was deeply concerned about whether she would be able to keep schools open.

“This is only the second day of school, and already we have positive cases among children,” she said in a recent interview. Her district has a mask mandate, but with 37,000 students, “I just introduced 37,000 more opportunities for the numbers to rise.”

In Laramie County, the center of the Delta surge in Wyoming, the Health Department proposed back-to-school clinics to Janet Farmer, the head nurse in the larger of the county’s two school districts. Ms. Farmer knew she would have to tread carefully. The flier she drafted for parents of students at the county’s three middle schools made little mention of Covid-19.

“Vaccines — NOT Mandatory,” it declared.

Nationally, more children are hospitalized with Covid-19 — an average of 276 each day — than at any other point in the pandemic. In Laramie County, Dr. Andrew B. Rose, a pediatrician at the Cheyenne Children’s Clinic and the president of Wyoming’s chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, said two newborns — one a few days old, the other younger than two weeks — were recently admitted to the hospital with Covid-19 symptoms after their parents tested positive.

Wyoming, a heavily Republican state where nearly 70 percent of voters cast their ballots for former President Donald J. Trump in 2020, has one of the nation’s lowest vaccination rates, with about a third of its population fully vaccinated. Laramie County has about 100,000 people and Cheyenne, the state capital, which bills itself as “home to all things Western” including “rodeos, ranches, gunslingers” and eight-foot-tall cowboy boots.

At Carey Junior High, few children or adults wore masks at the recent clinic, despite a sign on the door saying they were “strongly recommended.” Parents seemed to have visceral reactions; they were either enthusiastic about the Covid shot or adamantly against it. Those who were wavering were few and far between, and not easy to persuade.

A nurse in blue scrubs and her husband, a nuclear and missile operations officer at the nearby Air Force base, who declined to give their names, wandered past Ms. Bautista’s table with their 12-year-old son. Their daughter, 13, has cystic fibrosis and is vaccinated. But their son was reluctant. They chatted amiably with Ms. Bautista, but decided to wait.

Cheyenne Gower, 28, and her stepson Jaxson Fox, 12, both said they were leaning toward getting the shot after talking with their doctors. Ms. Gower, citing the Delta surge, said she would get vaccinated soon. Jaxson said he was “still thinking about it” after his pediatrician discussed the risk of heart inflammation, a very rare side effect seen in young boys ages 12 to 17.
“Put down that I’m more on the getting it side,” he instructed, eyeing a reporter’s notebook.

Although the vaccines were tested on tens of thousands of people and have been administered to nearly 200 million in the United States alone, many parents cited a lack of research in refusing. Aubrea Valencia, 29, a hair stylist, listened carefully as Ms. Bautista explained the reasons for the human papilloma virus and meningitis vaccines. Ms. Valencia agreed that her daughter should take both.

But when it came to the coronavirus vaccine, she drew the line. “The other two have been around longer,” she said, adding that she might feel “different about it if we had known someone who died” from the coronavirus.

Every once in a while, the nurses encountered a surprise, as when Kristen Simmons, 43, a professional dog handler, marched up with her son, Trent.

“He turned 12 on Monday, and so we want to get his Covid vaccine,” she declared. Ms. Bautista and the other nurses looked stunned.

“We tend to be more liberal,” Ms. Simmons later said — a statement that would have sounded odd in explaining a medical decision before the pandemic.

In the spring, when vaccines were limited to older Americans who were clamoring for them, officials including Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, the top U.S. infectious diseases expert, envisioned fall 2021 as the last mile of a campaign that could produce “herd immunity” by year’s end. Vaccinating children was crucial to that plan.

Now it is clear that will not happen. Children ages 11 and under are not yet eligible, but if and when the vaccine is authorized for them, experts expect it could be harder to persuade their parents than those of older children. A recent survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that parents of younger children were “generally more likely to be hesitant to vaccinating,” said Liz Hamel, who directed the research.

For school superintendents and public health officials who are intent on bringing students back to the classroom — and keeping them there — the low vaccination rates, coupled with the Delta surge, are worrisome.

Wyoming won national praise for keeping schools open all last year. Gov. Mark Gordon, who contracted Covid-19 last year and has encouraged people to get vaccinated, imposed a statewide mask mandate in December that he kept in place for schools even after he lifted it in March, which helped limit the spread of disease in classrooms. Despite the Delta surge and a recommendation from the C.D.C. for universal masking in schools, Mr. Gordon, a Republican, said this month that he would not impose another mandate and that he would leave it to each district to decide.

In Laramie County School District 1, which has about 14,000 students, including about 840 at Carey Junior High, the school board recently cut short its public meeting about masking when a man began ranting about another hot-button issue: critical race theory.
“Fifty percent of the calls here have been, ‘Please mask our kids,’ and 50 percent of the calls have been, ‘We’re not wearing masks,’” said Margaret Crespo, who left Boulder, Colo., about six weeks ago to become the new District 1 superintendent. “There’s no gray area.”

With schools scheduled to reopen on Monday, Dr. Crespo announced on Friday that masks would be required on school buses and highly recommended at other times when social distancing was not possible.

Fights over the masking issue are even more divisive than the vaccination campaign, “and that is playing out in front of our eyes,” said Ray Hart, the executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, which represents the country’s largest urban school districts.

“Everywhere I go this summer, that’s part of the message: Let’s get vaccinated,” said Allen Pratt, the executive director of the National Rural Education Association. But “because it’s government, you’ve got a line in the sand where people don’t trust you, and you’ve got to be understanding.”

White House officials have also been encouraging pediatricians to incorporate coronavirus vaccination into back-to-school sports physicals. Many districts are offering the shots during sports practice, with a reminder to athletes that if they are vaccinated, they will not have to quarantine and miss games if they are exposed to the coronavirus.

Laramie County District 1 offered coronavirus vaccines at mandatory clinics to educate high school student athletes about concussions; 32 students accepted shots, said Ms. Farmer, the nurse. The numbers were better at the junior high clinics; over two days at three schools with a total of about 2,400 students, more than 100 took their shots.

Ms. Farmer was satisfied.

“If it’s 100 people,” she said, “that’s 100 that didn’t have it yesterday.”
A large crowd is expected for a Clark County School Board meeting Wednesday to consider whether to mandate COVID-19 vaccinations for employees.

The School Board may take action during a special meeting at 5 p.m. at the Clark County Government Center.

There’s no proposed timeline for when a requirement for Clark County School District workers to be fully vaccinated could take effect. If approved, the mandate would allow for medical and religious exemptions.

About 25,000 of the district’s approximately 42,000 employees — nearly 60 percent — have already uploaded a completed COVID-19 vaccination card into emocha Health, the system used to monitor their vaccine status, the district said last week. Those who haven’t are required to undergo weekly testing.

The district called a vaccine mandate the “responsible, commonsense course of action we’ve seen many other government agencies, companies, institutions and organizations pursue” in a statement on Friday and said it’s important to protect students younger than 12 who aren’t eligible to get vaccinated and to keep school buildings open for in-person classes.

The Clark County Education Association teachers union supports all efforts to keep schools as safe as possible, including vaccinations, Executive Director John Vellardita said Tuesday, but can’t sign off on a mandate at this point.
The teachers union needs to learn what the mandate is, how it will be implemented and whether it will have some unintended consequences, he said.

Also, due to problems with other school district actions such as school reopening and COVID-19 testing for employees, the union has grave concerns about whether Superintendent Jesus Jara’s administration would be able to effectively roll out an employee vaccination mandate, Vellardita said.

The union communicated with trustees on Tuesday, saying there should be a discussion before developing and implementing a mandate, “because part of our concern is that there may be an exit of staff of a significant level that may have an unintended consequence,” Vellardita said.

He said CCEA has some “workaround solutions” it would like to discuss.

The union surveyed nearly 9,000 educators and the majority indicated they support mandates such as for COVID-19 testing, masking and vaccines, but it wasn’t a supermajority, Vellardita said.

There’s a “significant bloc of folks” who have reservations and may leave their jobs if a vaccination mandate is approved, he said.

As of Tuesday, the school district’s hiring website had 819 licensed/certified job positions listed.

There are also more than 200 school bus driver vacancies, as of last week. And there’s a shortage of school nurses, Vellardita said.

If more employees leave, it could trigger larger class sizes with no social distancing for students, fuller school buses and fewer quarantine measures because there aren’t enough nurses in buildings, Vellardita said, noting COVID-19 transmission rates could go up as a result.
The Education Support Employees Association union said in a Monday post on Twitter that it has demanded to bargain with the school district over any testing or vaccination proposal, “which includes demanding that all pay and benefits remain in place as part of any approved testing and/or vaccination policy.”

“Entering our second full school year facing the COVID-19 pandemic, scientific evidence shows us that COVID-19 vaccines, combined with other safety measures, such as stringent testing, are the most powerful weapon we have against the pandemic,” the union said. “Along with vaccinations, such testing accommodations for those who are unable to be vaccinated are appropriate, responsible, and necessary to ensure our schools can remain open and our students remain safe.”

**Dueling online petitions**

Two Change.org petitions are circulating related to the school district’s proposed vaccination mandate — one opposed and one in favor.

Natalie Larson, a parent of three school district students, created the petition titled “Medical Freedom of Choice for Clark County School District Employees,” which opposes the measure.

As of Tuesday morning, 7,755 people had signed it. It’s addressed to Superintendent Jesus Jara and school board President Linda Cavazos.

Larson, who launched the petition Saturday, said she attended last week’s School Board meeting in-person and was overwhelmed by the number of constituents presenting whose concerns were being dismissed.

The reasoning behind starting a petition: “I just don’t want to co-parent with CCSD,” she said.

Medical mandates don’t have any place in a free society, Larson said, noting medicine is never a one-size-fits-all solution.
If no one backs up school employees, the district will lose a lot of amazing workers, Larson said. “A lot of them are willing to leave their job and students over this, and it’s absolutely tragic to me.”

Larson said a secondary fear is that if someone doesn’t draw the line here, she worries a COVID-19 vaccination mandate for students could be coming in the future.

She said she’s not pro-vaccination or anti-vaccination, or pro-mask or anti-mask. “I just want freedom of choice.”

Larson said she has signed up to speak during a public comment period at the Wednesday school board meeting. She plans to bring a printout of the petition with the signatures and comments to deliver to Jara and the trustees.

The petition references the Nuremberg Code, a document drawn up in 1947 by American judges sitting in judgment of Nazi doctors accused of conducting notorious human medical experiments in concentration camps. Among other things, it states that people shouldn’t be the subject of medical experiments without voluntary consent.

“Public policy further demands that uncoerced consent is required,” according to the petition.

The clear policy choice to protect a person’s right to choose “is further supported by the fact that whether these are actually safe and effective is not yet known,” the petition alleges, referring to the COVID-19 vaccines.

National health and legal experts have said the Nuremberg Code isn’t applicable to COVID-19 vaccines, which went through clinical trials where participants provided consent and have emergency use authorization by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.
The Pfizer vaccine gained full authorization last week for those 16 and older, and remains under emergency use authorization for those ages 12-15 and for third doses for those who are immunocompromised.

The rival petition, titled “CCSD COVID Vaccination Should be Mandatory,” is circulating in favor of a vaccination mandate.

As of Tuesday morning, 380 people had signed it. It’s addressed to Jara, Nevada Superintendent of Public Instruction Jhone Ebert, Gov. Steve Sisolak, the Southern Nevada Health District, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Kindergarten teacher Angie Sullivan, who’s also part of the Clark County Education Association’s social justice caucus, created the petition about two weeks ago.

Sullivan said it’s important to get vaccinated not only for yourself, but for your community. “It has to be mandated,” she said.

She also noted that teachers are already required to receive other vaccinations.

The teacher had COVID-19 and still had symptoms a year later, but noted some of those symptoms subsided after getting vaccinated.

“For a lot of people, this is not the flu,” Sullivan said. “This is something you don’t want to get.”

**Other employee opinions**

Other CCSD employees spoke out for and against a vaccination mandate at least week’s board meeting, before the district revealed that it would seek board approval for such a measure. Others have been quietly making their opinions heard ahead of Wednesday’s meeting.
High school social studies teacher Robert Cowles said he thinks a vaccination mandate is the wrong approach. He emailed Jara and trustees over the weekend suggesting they should incentivize vaccination instead.

That approach should have started this summer once it was apparent the delta variant was the more contagious and dominant COVID-19 strain, he said.

For example, he said, the district could use a “carrot and stick” approach where everyone who’s vaccinated by the end of September would get $1,000 and those who aren’t would get charged an additional $100 per month toward their health care costs.

Cowles cited already existing financial issues with THT Health, the health insurance plan for district teachers, noting it’s expensive if someone becomes seriously ill with COVID-19 and requires hospitalization.

Cowles said he’s pro-vaccination and got his first COVID-19 shot in January and the second in February.

But he said he understands people who don’t want to get vaccinated. “I disagree, but I understand their position,” he said

He said he doesn’t like the idea of the school district forcing people to get vaccinated in order to remain employed or having to find another job.

The school district, he said, “can’t afford to lose teachers who are going to be bent out of shape (about the) vaccine mandate because they’re vehemently opposed to vaccines or they’re vehemently opposed to this vaccine or whatever,” he said. “We’re that shorthanded that we can’t afford to lose anybody.”

Due to staffing shortages, Cowles sold both of his prep periods and is teaching eight classes a day this school year.
Mandates in educational settings

The Clark County School District isn’t the first in Nevada to move forward with considering a COVID-19 vaccination mandate for educational settings.

The Nevada System of Higher Education plans to ask its Board of Regents at a Sept. 10 meeting to consider drafting policy amendments that would require employees to be fully vaccinated by Dec. 1.

NSHE employees, who are included in the state’s approximately 27,000 employees, are currently required to either be fully vaccinated or undergo weekly testing.

Last month, the State Board of Health voted to require all public college and university students to be fully vaccinated in order to enroll for the spring 2022 semester. Medical and religious exemptions are allowed.

Some of the nation’s largest public school districts have also recently announced similar mandates, including the New York City Department of Education, Chicago Public Schools and Los Angeles Unified School District.

California is requiring public and private school kindergarten through 12th grade employees to be vaccinated or undergo regular testing. Washington state also recently announced a vaccination requirement for both public and private school employees.

The Council of the Great City Schools, a Washington, D.C.-based advocacy organization that represents about 75 of the nation’s largest school districts, has an online tracker on Education Week’s website showing how many districts are requiring COVID-19 vaccinations for employees, as well as COVID-19 testing and face masks.
As of Tuesday, it showed 34 percent of districts that are organization members have a staff vaccination mandate, which includes districts that require either vaccination or COVID-testing.

In total, 93 percent of districts have a mask mandate and 69 percent have COVID-19 testing, either mandatory or optional.
Why NYC kids and parents deserve a remote option

By STEPHANIE FAGIN-JONES
SEP 04, 2021 AT 5:00 AM

Back in March 2020, when the first wave of COVID-19 hit New York City, there was no question about schools going remote. Fast forward to now, as the much more infectious and contagious delta variant wreaks havoc across the country, resulting in a dramatic increase in the rate of child hospitalizations with COVID-19 in the U.S. since July, prompting the Centers for Disease Control to acknowledge that the war has changed.

Alarmingly, child case rates in NYC are seven to 10 times higher this week than in the same week in 2020, and positivity rates among school-aged children have skyrocketed since the end of the school year, surpassing any age group in NYC.

“In light of this data,” proposes education Prof. Jen Jennings of Princeton, “Let’s evaluate the argument against offering families a remote schooling option this fall.”

But last week, ignoring the current scientific reality and disregarding the fundamental rights of concerned parents to make decisions about our children’s safety and education, Mayor de Blasio announced his back-to-school strategy based on outdated pre-delta data. Furthermore, de Blasio, who regularly touts his progressivism, inexplicably has chosen to join the ranks of policymakers in states like Texas, Florida and Missouri in removing any remote options for families, thereby forcing city parents to gamble with our kids’ health, if not their lives.

I’m a researcher who has studied heroism and morality throughout my 20-year career as a social scientist. In his “final act” as a mayor with likely gubernatorial aspirations, de Blasio is putting politics over pediatrics, peddling a false narrative and posing as a hero offering students a
“homecoming” in the fall, as if they were completing a hero’s journey, when in reality, they are just now entering the belly of the whale.

As a parent and psychologist, I know that schoolchildren, with certain exceptions, do best when they are learning in person, and that an eventual return to in-person learning should be our goal. However, even the most conservative epidemiological models on the delta variant suggest that sending unvaccinated kids with masks to school could result in 40% of elementary schoolers testing positive within three months.

Believe me, I would much rather my kids return to school in the fall than learn remotely, but according to a recent survey, thousands of families, among them Black and Hispanic, who often have the least access to and may be the most negatively impacted by remote learning, are far from assured that the proposed strategies will keep our schoolchildren safe and are clamoring for a centralized remote option.

De Blasio says his strategy is based on a “gold standard of health and safety measures.” But the CDC itself says that their guidelines confirming the effectiveness of school safety measures like masking, spacing and testing are based on the much weaker alpha-, not delta-variant data and thus warrant increased vigilance.

Disturbingly, the DOE in numerous ways is being less vigilant than last year, for example, by not: tracking vaccination status; requiring a baseline negative COVID test to start school; ensuring social distancing in overcrowded schools; and by ill-advisedly reducing “opt-in” random testing to twice a month for 10% of unvaccinated students, down from 20% each week last year, thus flouting the CDC K-12 guidelines stating that testing in areas with high community transmission should be conducted at least once per week.

As parents, we’re not all in the same boat. Not all parents can utilize or even want a remote option. Mental health concerns about academic decline, anxiety and depression due to social isolation are real. Yet parents all over the city are joining the call for remote learning, something
that’s being offered in 85% of the 69 member districts represented by the Council of the Great City Schools.

De Blasio is putting parents and children in a double bind by mandating a return to the classroom while medical experts question the safety of this choice. “It’s a sad thing to say that our kids are really guinea pigs,” laments Catherine Troisi, an infectious disease epidemiologist at UT School of Public Health.

If even one of our too-young-to-be-vaccinated “guinea pigs” contracts COVID-19 and fails to “come home” as a result of de Blasio’s hazardous policy, it will not only be tragic, but also morally inexcusable, given that it could have been prevented.

Fagin-Jones is an adjunct associate professor of psychology at Columbia University Teachers College.
How Chicago Public Schools Responded to COVID-19

Clarence Carson helped lead a variety of initiatives during the pandemic -- including ventilation assessments and deep cleanings of all facilities. His leadership served as a model for other school districts during the pandemic.

By Dave Lubach, managing editor
FACILITIES MANAGEMENT
9/14/2020

March 6, 2020, is a day that Clarence Carson will never forget. It was the day the pandemic hit CPS, when a student at a special-needs school contracted COVID-19. After watching all of the initial drama over the coronavirus unfold in the U.S. on the west coast and cruise ships, the pandemic finally hit home. Carson and his team started cramming for what would happen next.

“We had to work quickly with the EPA and the CDC, as well as the Illinois Department of Public Health, and the Chicago Department of Public Health to understand what the issue was we were trying to identify,” he says. “It was a new viral issue. We thought it was airborne and also [spread on] surfaces as well, so we wanted to take the utmost precaution as possible.

“Students were very sensitive to these kinds of issues, of course, and since there were special-needs students, the risk was very high. We brought in a heightened level of cleaning and disinfection in the entire building.”

CPS moved to distance learning for all students on March 16. Carson’s team switched gears to focus on deep cleaning all of the CPS facilities, and preparing for a return of students and faculty that nobody knew when exactly would occur. The preparations also included retrofitting buildings to accommodate social distancing and adding sanitizing stations — a significant task with 1,300 buildings to address. They also distributed a staggering 1.2 million COVID-related signs.

CPS also hired a third-party consultant to conduct an indoor air quality (IAQ) assessment, as has been common at institutional and commercial facilities during the pandemic. Surveys have shown that IAQ ranks high on the list of building occupants’ priorities as buildings reopen.

“We did a ventilation assessment to figure out how our buildings breathe,” Carson says. “That looked at both natural ventilation and mechanical ventilation in all of our spaces. We made repairs based on those assessments so that when it came time to reopen, we would be ready in a safe environment.”

In addition to ensuring that the schools would be safe for reopening (which started in January this year), CPS schools also served as hubs for COVID testing and later as vaccinations for the city.
“We did drive-through testing in the parking lots, but when we started doing the vaccinations, they were inside the gyms,” Carson says. “We’d use large spaces to allow for proper social distancing and allowed for controlled egress in and out of the building.”

As the 2021-22 school year gets underway, CPS anticipates a full five-day return to in-person classes for students. With cases on the rise across the U.S. and the Delta variant of coronavirus wreaking havoc, that plan could change. But as of this printing, Carson says the plan is for students and staff to maintain 3-foot social distancing at schools, mandatory masks as per Illinois Gov. Pritzker’s mandate for the state’s public schools, and continued emphasis on hand washing and sanitizing.

“None of us have a crystal ball, and we’re all trying to do our best to take what we know today and project out conservatively for the safety of our students and staff and the inhabitants of our facilities,” Carson says.

**Leading during COVID**

The pandemic resulted in a lot of uncertainty in the country and around the world, and especially in the facilities management realm. The unprecedented pandemic raised a lot of questions locally and nationally among school districts.

To help answer some of these questions, Carson used his strong communication skills to organize meetings in his district to unite his team’s efforts and crowdsource solutions for fellow facility managers across the country.

Locally, Carson used the pandemic to ensure departments inside his team were all on the same page.

“One of the best parts of our strategy locally has been a real partnership between budget procurement and facilities,” he says. “We were able to create a weekly meeting and were able to meet two times a week where we reviewed the needs of the district and then were able to find the recommended manufacturers of products, test those products, review pricing, look at the overall logistics, and deliver to our end-users and schools quickly.”

This helped centralize the process for CPS, Carson says. Before COVID, individual schools in the district would purchase products separately, creating higher costs. With a centralized approach, CPS collaborated its money in a more effective way.

“It created a high-level of equity for our entire district,” he says. “We were not depending on certain schools that might have had lower funding to get their own product and their own resources. We had a very balanced, equitable approach to procuring resources for all of our schools throughout the entire pandemic.”

**Nationally, Carson emerged as a major player in helping school districts get through the pandemic. As a member of the Council of the Great City Schools, Carson worked with other facility managers from the biggest school districts across the country to bounce ideas off of each other, discuss issues that came up during the pandemic, and provide a support group for everyone during the difficult times. Carson organized a group of managers that met remotely every Friday.**
“Knowing the other guys, if they thought the meetings would have been a waste of time, they wouldn’t have done it,” says Bob Carlson, director of management services for the Council.

One of the participants was John Shea, the CEO of facilities and maintenance with the New York City Department of Education, who deals with many of the same challenges Carson faces in Chicago.

“Having contacts and relationships with colleagues across the country was critical to our COVID recovery and success,” says Shea. “The ability to share information, stories, successes, failures, concerns, and pretty much anything else was hugely helpful technically, and the ability to hear from our friends was absolutely emotionally supporting and inspiring.

“Some days were hard to get through, and knowing that other people were going through the same thing and understood your situation was helpful beyond words.”

It’s that mix of concern, compassion and smarts from Carson that caught Rivera’s eye in 2018, and the same traits that placed Carson at a PTA meeting with his daughter.

“One thing Clarence really brings to the role is not just the subject matter expertise, but the perspective as a parent,” Rivera says. “The work that he’s doing to make sure that buildings are warm, safe, and dry and ready to receive students, it’s not abstract in nature. He views the work through the lens of a parent, and I think that’s very evident in what he does and it helps him connect with the principals, teachers, and other stakeholders.”

*Dave Lubach is the managing editor for the facility market team. He has six years of experience writing for the facility management industry.*
The Decline of Hybrid Learning for This School Year, in 4 Charts

By Benjamin Herold — September 27, 2021

School districts all over the country spent the 2020-21 school year using a mix of in-person and remote instruction to keep kids learning while limiting the spread of COVID-19. At the beginning of this school year, however, their focus has shifted almost entirely from such hybrid learning models to a mix of fully in-person learning and full-time virtual schools.

That switch in philosophy, detailed in a recent Education Week special report, left some experts concerned about continuity of learning in the face of rising virus-related quarantines.

“I see the fact that schools aren’t making plans for continued disruptions as irresponsible,” said Michael K. Barbour, an expert in virtual learning at Touro University California, as the new academic year got underway. “The reality is that this school year is going to look a lot more like 2020-21 than 2018-19.”

The charts below detail the dramatic drop in hybrid learning in K-12 schools. All figures are from a nationally representative survey of 1,241 educators administered online by the EdWeek Research Center in late August and early September.

1. The use of hybrid learning has declined dramatically.

Last year, more than two-thirds of educators said their district used a hybrid model that mixed in-person and remote instruction. In 2021-22, that figure is down to less than one-fourth.

“The goal this year was to really stand up in-person learning for students five days a week. Going into the summer, that seemed feasible,” said Raymond C. Hart, the executive director of the Council for Great City Schools, a 75-member coalition including many of the country’s largest urban school systems.

With the Delta variant raging and a small but significant subset of schools forced to enact new quarantines, leaving thousands of students without clear paths to connect to their classrooms, that approach has caused some second-guessing. But Hart said districts were following both the science and the state and federal guidance that was available over the summer.

“Districts first and foremost were trying to ensure they could implement mask mandates and mitigate the spread of the virus,” he said. “They could try to address the challenges of quarantine after that.”

2. Full-time virtual schools are now the go-to “hybrid” option.
Complicating matters, the time and resources schools have invested in remote learning has been largely focused on standing up full-time virtual schools.

Barbour of Touro University California described that strategy as a smart response to the pressures of a competitive school-choice marketplace, especially in states with a robust cyber-charter sector. At the same time, however, full-time virtual schools likely won’t help with emergency COVID-19 outbreaks, in large part because students are often required to be enrolled for an entire semester or academic year.

“For districts to move some of their eggs into that basket is a good strategy,” he said. “But they’re not going to be able to handle [quarantined students] at scale.”

3. The overwhelming majority of teachers are back on campus, teaching solely in-person students.

Just 7 percent of teachers told the EdWeek Research Center they’d be teaching a mix of in-person and remote learners this school year.

In places like Hillsborough County, Fla., that represents a dramatic shift from last year, when the 220,000-student school system rolled out a robust hybrid “eLearning” model that had teachers instructing in-person and remote students simultaneously. Teachers were exhausted by that approach, said Stephanie Baxter-Jenkins, the executive director of the local teachers’ union. But the decision to scrap hybrid learning has created new problems this school year, when as many as 11,000 students have been quarantined at a time.

Hybrid instruction “was completely overwhelming, doubled our work, and burnt teachers out,” Baxter-Jenkins said. But this year, “I think people are struggling with how to handle the amount of quarantined kids we have.”

4. Remote students have been left to learn via a grab-bag of instructional models.

Attending full-time virtual schools? Working with dedicated online teachers? Following along with in-person lessons as they’re livestreamed on a video conferencing platform? Working independently on “asynchronous” classwork?

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Such variety and flexibility could be an encouraging sign that schools are moving away from one-size-fits-all models of education, said Susan Patrick, the president and CEO of the Aurora Institute, an advocacy group that promotes personalized learning.

But making these new approaches actually work will take planning and long-term investment.

“The barriers for states are finding the will to change, and modernizing and retooling teacher-training and professional development programs,” Patrick said. “The pandemic may be here longer than anyone initially anticipated, and schools leaders need to find a path forward.”
DISTRICT LEADERSHIP
Biden’s Pick for Deputy Education Secretary Faces Criticism Over Charter School Views

By Evie Blad — March 10, 2021

After a relatively smooth confirmation process for U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona, President Joe Biden’s pick to help lead the Education Department may face stronger headwinds.

San Diego Unified Superintendent Cindy Marten has seen support from prominent national education leaders. But she’s also faced criticism from charter school advocates, parent activists, and the San Diego chapter of the NAACP.

Chief among the critics’ concerns is one of the most divisive issues in Biden’s education platform: charter schools.

Groups like the Center for Education Reform and the Powerful Parent Movement have singled out Marten’s criticism of charter school policy in California and her work on a task force that supported changes to the state’s authorizing laws.

If Marten is confirmed “we risk reverting to an Education Department that serves the system and not the students and parents striving to succeed within it,” said a statement from the Powerful Parent Network which confronted 2020 Democratic presidential candidates about their positions on school choice.

But Marten’s nomination has also won praise. The Learning Policy Institute, an organization founded by Linda Darling-Hammond, who led the Biden transition team’s education efforts, labeled San Diego a “positive outlier” district in California under Marten’s leadership, citing efforts to improve academic equity. University of Southern California Education Dean Pedro Noguera said he was happy with the choice.

Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of large urban public school systems, offered the organization’s “enthusiastic support” for Marten after the choice was announced in January.

“Cindy Marten will be the perfect complement” to Cardona, he said in a statement. “Both have been school-level leaders and thoroughly understand the complexities of public education at the state and local levels like few other leadership teams in the department’s history.”

While their confirmation hearings typically receive less attention from the general public, deputy education secretaries play a key role in the Education Department. They
help set policy and lead major initiatives, and they are next in line to take over agency leadership if the secretary leaves.

It’s unclear if the criticisms, or the praise, will affect senators’ support of Marten.

“Senator Murray is committed to working with Secretary Cardona to make sure every single student can recover from this pandemic and that we address the longstanding inequities in our education system,” said an aide to Sen. Patty Murray, a Washington Democrat and chairwoman of the Senate education committee. “Like all of President Biden’s qualified nominees, Senator Murray looks forward to hearing from Cindy Marten about how she would work to address systemic racism in our education system as part of Secretary Cardona’s team.”

Representatives for the White House and for Republican leadership on the Senate education committee did not respond to questions.

**Positions on charter schools**

Charter school supporters who’ve criticized Marten zero in on her past assertions that the publicly funded, independently managed schools draw money away from traditional public school districts.

California has the second-oldest charter school law in the country, and it has a much larger and more-complex charter school sector than other states.

In 2019, Marten served on a state task force that recommended changes to the state’s charter laws, including a recommendation that school districts should be allowed to consider the “fiscal impact” of a new charter school in the authorization process. Those recommendations informed a contentious debate that led to new state laws following compromise discussions between teachers’ unions and charter school organizers.

Maureen Magee, a spokesperson for the San Diego district, noted that, at the local level, the school system has approved five out of six charter renewal applications for the current school year, and a sixth one is pending. The district has also sought input from charter operators on its policies and set aside money for charter facilities in public bond issues, she said.

The San Diego NAACP, which criticized Marten, notably broke from the national NAACP in 2019 when it opposed a national call for a moratorium on charter schools. Several 2020 Democratic presidential candidates cited that national NAACP position when they called for new limits on charter schools.

The national NAACP has also split with its San Diego branch on Marten’s nomination. National NAACP President Derrick Johnson called her “a great pick” by Biden.

But, in a joint statement, the National Charter Collaborative and the Freedom Coalition for Charter Schools faulted Marten for her support of “extreme anti-charter school
restrictions,” saying her selection nullifies the goodwill Biden earned by selecting Cardona.

Cardona won support from education groups across the ideological spectrum when he took a relatively neutral posture on charter schools, in part because the charter sector in his home state of Connecticut is smaller and less controversial. Even so, some GOP senators who voted against his confirmation cited Biden’s positions on charters and school choice, not Cardona’s.

While the U.S. Department of Education administers a grant program for charter schools, most decisions about governance are made at the state and local levels. Biden has pledged not to provide federal funding to “for-profit” charter schools and has said most of his education department’s efforts will focus on the “neighborhood public schools” that a majority of students attend.

**Confronting disparities in school discipline**

San Diego media outlets and local activists have flagged some other criticisms of Marten’s tenure.

The local NAACP focused most of its statement on disproportionately high rates of discipline for Black students in San Diego schools, a persistent problem at school systems around the country.

In 2019-20, Black students in San Diego Unified represented 7.5 percent of total enrollment and 17.9 percent of students suspended, state data show. Latino students made up 44.3 percent of enrollment and 53.3 percent of students suspended, while white students made up 23.9 percent of students and 13.8 percent of those suspended.

Statewide, Black students made up 5.4 percent of California’s enrollment and 15 percent of students suspended in 2019-2020, the data show.

The Learning Policy Institute report noted the district’s work to reduce discipline disparities by eliminating zero-tolerance policies and promoting restorative practices as an alternative to suspensions. And it noted that the district’s suspension rates were lower than some other large California districts’.

The district has also narrowed its list of expellable offenses in recent years.

The local NAACP noted voluntary racial equity training in the district.

“While this is commendable, it does not erase the fact that SDUSD has a history of harming our children, families, staff, and educators,” Katrina Hasan Hamilton, education chair of the San Diego branch, said in a statement.

**The challenge of reopening schools**
Much of Cardona’s confirmation hearing focused on his positions on coronavirus-related school closures and how federal officials can encourage schools to safely reopen.

The Biden administration has promised more guidance for schools about how to offer in-person learning or, for districts operating in a hybrid mode, to expand the amount of time students are taught in-person.

The president’s relief bill, which passed Congress this week, also includes funding for testing, virus mitigation, and ongoing recovery efforts as schools help students rebound from interrupted education.

Much of that strategy aligns with Marten’s. In November, Marten wrote a letter to Biden’s transition team outlining how she’d worked with local scientists to design a COVID-19 testing and mitigation plan for her schools. She said equity should be a key focus in schools’ response efforts.

A majority of the district’s students have remained in remote learning as it waited to clear state virus rate thresholds required for reopening. San Diego Unified plans to reopen schools April 12.
Hillsborough School Board member: Can we fire superintendent Addison Davis?

Some constituents want to see it happen. But the board has agreed to draft an improvement plan instead.

By Marlene Sokol
April 19, 2021

TAMPA — Hillsborough County superintendent Addison Davis survived what could have been a call for his dismissal on Monday, but not without incurring criticism from his School Board, which will now draft a document laying out their expectations for him.

The professional development plan, as some are calling it, will be worked on Tuesday, April 27, at a 9:30 a.m. workshop.

It follows an outpouring of criticism over the way the district notified nearly 100 teachers that their jobs would not exist after the end of this school year. Teachers learned the news Friday in a batch email that began with the phrase: “Dear HCPS Educator.” Some said their principals did not know they were being dismissed. They thought their jobs were safe after April 9, when 1,000 other job cuts were announced.

The email said the teachers were not eligible to find new positions during the transfer and pool periods for longtime employees. They were advised to check back after mid-May to see if retirements or resignations had created any openings.

A union grievance filed Sunday called the emails “callous” and “appalling,” describing them as vague, unsigned and generic in tone. The messages “failed to show any gratitude for the employee working through a pandemic or regret for ‘having to’ take such a drastic action,” the grievance said.

On Facebook, constituents asked board member Jessica Vaughn what it would take to fire Davis, who has been on the job since March of 2020.

Vaughn explained the need for a board majority, then posted: “Take a poll of your current board members and ask them who would vote to end the superintendent’s contract. Let me know if we have the votes. I can’t ask the other board members or I would violate sunshine laws. Call them up, ask them privately. If you think we have the votes, send me a private message.”

Davis said Monday that Friday’s email to employees — 91, by his count — was not handled properly. “As superintendent, I have to own that,” he said.
Those affected include Stacie Emory, a music teacher at Bryan Elementary School in Plant City. Her husband, a music teacher at Madison Middle School, got an email too, she said.

Emory said that, because of a stipend her husband receives for leading the school band, he was able to keep his job.

She was not. “My husband and I moved here from Colorado because of the reputation of the music programs in Hillsborough County,” she said. “We have no family here. It’s devastating.”

Teachers such as Emory are considered “one-year contract” employees because they were hired after 2011, when tenure rights were discontinued under state law.

However, Stephanie Baxter-Jenkins, executive director of the teachers’ union, said that, until now, the district has not dismissed these teachers unless there were performance issues. Those issues are explained during a process called “re-nomination,” and disclosed before March 31.

The district’s financial struggles are not new. After a prior board fired superintendent MaryEllen Elia in 2015, her successor, Jeff Eakins, learned that the district’s main reserve account had lost more than $200 million, largely because of a new pay plan that coincided with a teaching reform experiment.

Eakins made some moves to rein in spending. But the low reserve remained an issue.

A study by the Council of the Great City Schools found supervisors were filling jobs that were not funded. The district was using capital accounts to shore up its operational budget. Compared to other Florida districts, Hillsborough was overstaffed by 3,000 employees. The way things were going, Davis and deputy superintendent Michael Kemp said, the district would run out of money this spring, spurring a possible state takeover.

Davis said the new round of cuts happened when district leaders discovered last week that, because of other cuts and a limited number of positions in the hiring pool, they could not guarantee placement to the newer employees.

He said he spent the latter part of the week trying to find more than $8.4 million to pay the teachers, with no success, and that he was able to reduce the number affected from 114 to 91.

As for the growing social media campaign against him, Davis said: “I was hired to transform Hillsborough County. And in that process, we had to make some very difficult decisions. We changed instructional focus. We changed instructional frameworks. We’ve increased accountability. I led this district through a pandemic, successfully. And on top of that I’m facing budget downfalls over and over again. And while you’re cutting 2,000 people it’s hard to build relationships. It’s hard to build trust.”
Vaughn said Davis’ actions have caused an erosion of trust between him and the board. “I don’t feel this board is directing the superintendent,” she said. “I feel like the superintendent is pretty much doing whatever he wants. And maybe he tells us and maybe he doesn’t.”

During a long discussion Monday about members’ frustrations with Davis, however, Vaughn did not call for his dismissal. Instead, she joined the others in agreeing to hold him to the document they will prepare next week.

“I think we all agree we want you to succeed,” Vaughn told Davis, after telling him earlier, “you might not be a good fit for our district.”

Several said Davis is too much of a micro-manager, insisting on communicating nearly all information with the workforce. They said that habit, coupled with his assembling of a cabinet from his last post in Clay County, makes it difficult for longtime Hillsborough administrators to trust him.

“I think the problem with morale is not COVID, and it’s not even the financial situation,” said Nadia Combs. “It’s the way top leadership communicates.”

Henry “Shake” Washington said he is concerned about minority assistant principals who lost their jobs this month. And, like most of the others, he was horrified about the Friday email blast. “I’ve talked to 14 principals already. They’re very upset,” he said. “This is a severe hit and this is something that is hard to overcome.”

Member Melissa Snively defended Davis, saying he was hired to make profound changes in the district and his work during the pandemic was “Herculean.” She blasted Vaughn for the Facebook post.

“You were trying to count votes to get rid of this man,” Snively said. “This is a human being. Our teachers absolutely deserve respect. But so does this man.”

Karen Perez, after agreeing for the need to set clear expectations, warned Davis, “I intend to hold you accountable.”
When Mayor Lori Lightfoot offers someone the job of running Chicago Public Schools, she will try to sell it as an opportunity to bring “transformative change to our public education system,” as she put it on Monday.

But in reality, the next chief executive officer of the nation’s third largest school district will be walking into a complex, difficult job at a precarious time. Even CEO Janice Jackson, who called it her “dream job,” is stepping away this summer after three years at the helm.

For one, there is no guarantee that Lightfoot will be reelected mayor in two years. As Lightfoot campaigns, the next CEO will have to navigate a highly politicalized election season in which the head of CPS will be under the microscope. Making any big changes during this time likely will be difficult.

And then if Lightfoot loses, a new mayor may want to bring in his or her own team to take over.

Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, said he thinks the top job in Chicago Public Schools would appeal to many candidates. He points out Chicago is an attractive city and that the school district has made a lot of academic gains in recent years.

But the fact that the mayor’s term is up in two short years will be a “big consideration” for candidates, he said.

The school district also may be taken out of the mayor’s control altogether, as momentum is building behind a bill that would eventually create an elected school board in Chicago. It’s currently appointed by the mayor. While many details of a final bill are still unclear, an elected board would likely be given the power to hire its own school district leader.

On top of the possible temporary nature of the job, the next CEO will have to find a way to work with both the mayor and the Chicago Teachers Union, both of which can be challenging.
Outgoing CEO Janice Jackson found herself in the middle of what became a toxic relationship between the mayor and the teachers union. At the press conference announcing her resignation Monday, Jackson called the politics in education in Chicago “ugly” and an “outlier.”

She admitted that she’s worn out from the fighting between the school district and the teachers union. Under her watch, the union went on strike once and came close several other times.

Of the union, she said “the tactics they use, I don’t agree with and they make it very difficult for good people to do these jobs.”

Gov. JB Pritzker also recently signed a bill expanding the union’s bargaining rights, which could force the school district to negotiate more with the union and potentially face more labor unrest.

Jackson, who will leave on June 30, also had to manage the mayor, who is notoriously difficult to work for. Jackson said she and the mayor developed a friendship over time and said she doesn’t think the mayor gets enough credit for work she’s done for CPS. But others inside CPS say that Jackson never felt supported by Lightfoot in the same way she was supported by former Mayor Rahm Emanuel, who appointed her to the job in 2018.

In the Chicago Teachers Union statement on Jackson’s departure, the union pointed to the mayor as an obstacle for the next school district leader. Union leaders have publicly noted tensions during contract negotiations between the mayor and school district officials.

“We are hopeful the mayor can improve on her ability to work collaboratively and cohesively with others, in particular her own staff and appointees in CPS,” the CTU statement reads.

While the union wished Jackson and two other departing top leaders “the best in their future endeavors,” it did not apologize for making their tenure difficult or indicate that they will back down in the future.

Along with Jackson, Chief Operating Officer Arnie Rivera and Chief Education Officer LaTanya McDade also recently announced they are leaving the district.

Pandemic effects

The next CEO also will be taking over at a time when the academic progress made over the past decade could be challenged. Jackson touted test scores growing at faster rates than anywhere else in the country and increasing graduation and college enrollment rates.
But Jackson and Chief Education Officer McDade sounded alarms this fall as they saw attendance and grades plummet while children were at home learning remotely during the pandemic.

“I worry that unless we act with urgency, we will lose a generation of students,” McDade told the Board of Education last fall. Jackson said the situation made her desperate to get students back into classrooms, learning in person.

They managed to eventually open schools, but most students are still remote. No one knows the lasting impact of the pandemic on academic achievement, but national research is predicting learning gaps, especially for low-income students and students of color. The next CEO will have to figure out how to counter any backsliding.

CPS’ new leader also will have to manage a windfall of $1.8 billion from the federal government. It’s to be used, in part, to mitigate learning loss. Jackson has said that before she leaves she plans to lay out a comprehensive framework for how this money will be spent.

But she won’t be around for the fight over it. Already, parent and community groups, as well as the Chicago Teachers Union, have said they want to have a say in how this money is spent.

And while advocates have said they don’t want to see the bulk of it spent on repaying debt, the school district is weighted down with it. At the end of the last fiscal year, the school district had about $8.1 billion in outstanding long-term debt and $500 million in outstanding short-term debt.

A shrinking school district

The pandemic also has exacerbated some long-standing, troubling trends in Chicago Public Schools, and the next CEO needs to be ready to deal with them.

The most critical is a loss of students. In the two decades prior to the pandemic, the school system was down more than 80,000 students. Then, this year, enrollment dropped by another 15,000, though some of those students could return next year.

As of this school year, 103 schools now have fewer than 250 students; up from 63 when Jackson took over. Some of these schools might rebound once classes are normal next year, but many of them had dwindling populations before the pandemic.

Because schools are funded based on enrollment, many of these schools struggle to offer robust programming. Jackson has provided many of them extra grants, but that makes them expensive to run. They include charter schools and once-vibrant neighborhood high schools that aren’t attracting students.

Lightfoot and Jackson have shied away from closing schools. But they also have not presented a comprehensive strategy for dealing with under-enrolled buildings.
The next CEO will inherit the hard questions of what to do with these schools in a way that takes into account communities, the budget and, most importantly, the quality of education for the students who attend them.
Has COVID-19 Led to a Mass Exodus of Superintendents?

By Stephen Sawchuk — May 06, 2021

The weight of the superintendency is heavy these days: Beleaguered staff. Exhausted teachers. Angry parents.

So as districts enter the spring—prime superintendent-resignation season—it’s a good time to ask: Will it all come to a head in a wave of superintendents racing for the exit doors?

Preliminary signs indicate an uptick in superintendent retirements and resignations so far this year. Two major recruitment firms for superintendents say they’ve been fielding an unusually high number of RFPs, and internal data from EdWeek’s Top School Jobs recruitment site also support this pattern.

Those data are bolstered by anecdotes from worried observers.

“Almost on a regular basis, I hear from a superintendent indicating that they can’t take it anymore and bail out,” said Dan Domenech, the president of AASA, the School Superintendents’ Association. “It’s a combination of stress on the job and being confronted with a no-win situation, when half of parents want their kids in school and the other half want them at home.”

There are reasons to be cautious about reading too much into these early reports. For one thing, high-quality estimates on superintendent tenure are difficult to come by, making it harder to establish a benchmark against which to compare this year’s hiring cycle.

But if the numbers pan out, the experts say, a newer, less experienced corps of superintendents will be charged with leading the nation’s schools come fall—all while helping them recover from months of disarray and while figuring out how to spend a bonanza in federal cash smartly and sustainably.

Search firms say more boards are putting out requests for leadership talent

As a testament to its concerns about superintendent turnover, the AASA recently launched a support network for superintendents who are under duress locally. It has about 25 in the network and plans to expand it to more, Domenech said.

Recruiters say they’re seeing some ominous signs, too.

Max McGee, the president of Hazard, Young, Attea and Associates, said his firm generally handles about 50 searches in each July-to-June academic year. It is already fielding about 80 searches this school year.

“Some of them are retiring early of their own accord; some are looking to move to downsized districts; frankly, some have been forced out,” he said. “What we’re seeing this year is directly related to pandemic issues.”
Data from EdWeek’s Top Schools Jobs, which offers recruitment and talent solutions, similarly found that listings for superintendent jobs, between July 2020 and April 2021, were up by about 10 percent compared with that same time period in 2019-20—and are on track to outpace last school year’s total listings.

Local news reports also predict similar instability. In Idaho, the pandemic appears to be fueling increased turnover, a trend that began a few years back. About a third of the state’s district leaders will have hired someone new over the past two years, according to Idaho Education News.

Traditionally, most hiring falls in the late-fall to early-spring cycle, but this year, the cycle has been pushed back later in the year, said Michael Collins, the president of Ray and Associates, another search firm. His company also handles 40 to 50 searches a year and is already beyond that mark, at about 65 so far.

“In January, there was this flurry of announcements. It actually happened as the vaccines rolled out and it appeared districts might be able to carry on and go back to live instruction,” he said. “And the superintendents who got picked up by March or spring break, now their [former] districts have vacancies.”

Collins said he anticipates 4,000 to 5,000 more superintendent vacancies than usual this year—some from those who planned to retire last summer but were persuaded to stay on for another year by desperate school boards. Now that infection rates are trending downward, many of those superintendents are finally following through.

National media, meanwhile, have picked up on the striking and unusual sight of the announced departure of superintendents from the nation’s three largest school districts within two months of one another. New York City’s Richard Carranza in March said he would step down. Austin Beutner of the Los Angeles district declined to renew his contract in late April. And just this week, Janice Jackson, who has spent 22 years in the Chicago public schools and became its CEO in 2018, said that she would depart this summer.

Despite national patterns, big-city superintendents are generally staying put

Some observers are cautious about reading too much into those patterns. Top officials at the Council of the Great City Schools, which represents 76 such large districts, say so far, the organization’s member districts have fewer openings in the first four months of this year than they typically do.

Usually there are about 12; this year, it’s only up to six, noted Michael Casserly, the executive director of the council, and some of those departures weren’t directly attributable to coronavirus pressures. San Diego’s Cindy Marten was tapped to take a post at the U.S. Department of Education, and Robert Runcie of Broward County, who is now negotiating the terms of his exit from that district, resigned in the wake of a perjury charge related to grand jury testimony over an alleged case of fraud in the district.

In all, said Casserly, turnover in those large urban districts appears to be periodic and more defined by local events than national catastrophes.

“Which is not to say that individual turnovers might not be related to something going on in the ether nationally,” he said, “but I’m not sure that drives turnovers on a grand scale.”
There is no longitudinal, nationally representative sample that tracks how long superintendents stay in their posts and can help pinpoint just how this year’s hiring cycle might compare with a normal one. Most estimates are based on superintendents’ current, rather than their completed tenure.

According to the AASA’s most recent figures, for example, a plurality of superintendents, about 47 percent, are now in years 2 to 5 of the job and about 28 percent are in years 6 to 10. A seminal 2018 report issued by the Broad Center, which offers leadership and management training for district leaders, tracked big-city superintendents over time and found that they stayed about five and a half years—longer than conventional wisdom.
Aurora board mulls taking more power from superintendent

By Yesenia Robles  May 25, 2021, 12:24pm MDT

Following a tumultuous year, the Aurora school board is weighing whether to embrace a hands-on approach to managing the district or whether to defer to the superintendent, as their own guidelines say they should.

The upcoming vote, on June 1, stems from the latest instance of the board blocking the superintendent and his administration. The district wanted to start the process outlined in district policy for cutting staff, but the board said no.

The board overseeing the fifth-largest district in Colorado has struggled for years to define its role with Superintendent Rico Munn. Munn’s contract has always stated that the board must follow what is known as a policy governance model. That means the superintendent makes decisions guided by board goals and policy. Approximately 30 Colorado school districts have this version of oversight, according to the Colorado Association of School Boards.

But the seven board members, a majority of whom were elected with help from the teachers union, have favored a more active role, despite a consultant’s urging that they stick to what they approved. Board members vary from being unapologetic about overriding Munn when they disagree with him, to wanting more clarity on the limits of their power. Some began questioning whether they serve only to rubber-stamp the district’s decisions.

A board decision next week on whether to do away with their current governance model and adopt one that allows a more active role would represent a major change to the board’s relationship with Munn and could have implications for his future.

In November, four of the seven board seats will be up for election. So far, none of those incumbents has announced if they will seek re-election. Board members say they want to clarify the board’s role for themselves and any new candidates before the election, so people know what to expect.

Consultant and trainer A.J. Crabill from the Council of the Great City Schools, who has worked with the board this school year, has warned that lack of clarity about the board’s role hurts the district.
“It is harmful to your organization’s ability to be effective, to say as a board ‘this is how we will function’ and then function in a materially different fashion than that,” Crabill said at a board meeting this month.

Aurora’s governance model was in place even prior to Munn becoming Aurora’s superintendent in 2013. Under this model, the superintendent makes decisions guided by board goals and policy. The Aurora board in addition has set limitations, to set guardrails on his work, such as not making major decisions without seeking community input.

“What you said is it’s my job, my responsibility, to sort through all the choices, make the best determination I can, and bring that to you,” Munn said, explaining his interpretation of the model. “You will then evaluate if it’s a reasonable interpretation of your policy — not whether you like it — but whether it’s a reasonable interpretation. And if it is, you will approve it.”

The explanation seemed to be new information to at least some board members, including Nichelle Ortiz, who said she didn’t like the pressure she felt to always go along with what’s presented. “I can’t stay with that plan if I’m always expected to just say yes,” she said.

This school year, the Aurora board reaffirmed its commitment to the model, adopting a new framework with new goals outlining the priorities board members wanted to focus on. That included goals around early literacy, postsecondary workforce readiness, and closing achievement gaps.

Those goals are also used to evaluate the work of the superintendent.

Munn and the district would not comment on the implications of a possible change in oversight.

Munn’s contract, which goes through 2023, states that “should the board elect to materially alter the governance policy, such changes may be deemed by the superintendent a unilateral termination by the district.” If that happens before June 30, that would trigger a severance payment of $180,000. Munn would have to provide a written notice 30 days prior to exercising that right, and the board and the superintendent must have discussions during that period to attempt to resolve concerns.
The board created a schedule to track progress toward the goals throughout the year. But those first conversations have been hampered by limited data, because the state and district halted many tests during remote learning.

At least twice this school year the board has argued about whether the district was straying from board goals.

In July the board overturned Munn’s plans to reopen school buildings.

After that, Munn tried to get the board to clarify who would make the next decision to reopen. But board members felt uncomfortable taking on the sole responsibility of deciding when it was safe to reopen, and struggled with what factors should be considered. They concluded the decision should be shared, but in November again reversed one of his reopening decisions.

More recently, when district staff sought approval to prepare for staff cuts, the board, in a split vote, refused and instead decided the district should not lay off any employees this year.

In response to board member complaints that the administration hadn’t considered other options, and that the board didn’t have other options, Munn earlier this month presented alternatives to layoffs. The board approved one that could cost the district up to $2.7 million.

Following that decision, board President Kayla Armstrong-Romero suggested that the board discuss how to administer a survey, including to administrative staff, about their perceptions of the board and their work. The board will take that up, and also when to release it and which groups to survey, on June 1.

Joshua Starr, a former schools superintendent, said that it’s common for boards to have trouble following a governance-type model for long. But he agreed not having clear roles is harmful.

“It makes an already difficult job that much more impossible,” said Starr, CEO of PDK International, a professional organization for educators. “I certainly would advocate for a governance model, but frankly clarity is what’s most important.”

Starr said the damage caused is not just to the superintendent’s work, but that it can have an impact on classrooms and on the community as well.
For example, he said, if a school board is swayed by political rhetoric such as the recent trend to police how teachers talk about race, a board might vote on banning certain books from schools.

Besides that decision having a direct impact on classrooms, it could also affect how free teachers feel to do their job, and how comfortable they are to raise issues with the administration or with their board.

For the public, seeing the fighting and not seeing progress on stated goals is what’s harmful, he said.

“Whenever people are fighting like this it decreases people’s confidence in the system, which means it becomes that much harder to make changes,” Starr said.

But all of this is also on the superintendent to fix, not just boards, Starr said.

“Part of the job of the superintendent is to make sure that the board, and the public for that matter, really understand each other’s roles and really spend time on it,” Starr said.
Charlotte Mayor Lyles Won't Take A Side In CMS-County Funding Battle

WFAE | By Steve Harrison
Published June 3, 2021 at 7:15 PM EDT

Charlotte Mayor Vi Lyles declined to take sides Thursday in the escalating fight between Mecklenburg County Commissioners and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school board over the county’s decision to withhold $56 million from the school system.

The city of Charlotte doesn’t fund the school system. But most CMS students are from the city, and the vast majority of its low-income students are from Charlotte.

The county is keeping the $56 million until CMS presents a detailed plan to close achievement gaps between white and Asian students and Black and Hispanic students.

“You know, I think the process that the state put in place for mediation or arbitration - however you define it - is because people do have disagreements and this is a way to have a collaborative discussion and make a difference and I believe the process needs to play out,” Lyles said while touring a vaccine clinic off Freedom Drive with Gov. Roy Cooper.

Lyles is referring to mediation between the county and CMS that is scheduled to start Monday. CMS announced Tuesday it would seek mediation that is allowed under state law.

When Lyles was asked whether she thinks the county is doing the right thing, she said: “I think that public education is number one in our recruiting area in economic development and good-paying jobs. Everybody wants their kids to be successful. I just want the best urban school district in the country.”

Though the CMS Board is officially non-partisan, most members are registered Democrats. All nine members of the Mecklenburg Commission are Democrats. Two Democratic commissioners – Laura Meier and Susan Rodriguez-McDowell – voted against the county budget because it holds money back from CMS. Lyles is also a Democrat.

Cooper also declined to take sides in the dispute.

“I expect local government officials to work together,” Cooper said. “I believe they will work together at the end of the day. I think it just shows the great passion for education and how important it is for this area and our state’s future and I hope they can work something out.”

Cooper then shifted the focus to Republican legislators, saying he’s trying to get them to spend more on education.
Mecklenburg County Manager Dena Diorio has said CMS must present a plan to improve the performance of 42 low-performing schools in the district. Other requirements include making sure that by 2024, 75% of students in all racial and ethnic groups graduate.

Diorio said CMS must also “limit the achievement gap disparity of college and career readiness to no more than 10% for each demographic subgroup by 2024.”

The metrics to determine college readiness include performance on end-of-course tests, as well as Advanced Placement tests, among other metrics.

CMS officials have said they already have a strategic plan in place. And they have said the county is acting as an unofficial school board.

Mecklenburg Commissioners are concerned about the achievement gaps between white and minority students. But that problem is not unique to CMS.

Michael Casserly is executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, an advocacy group for urban school districts. “I don’t know that any school district in the country has successfully, completely, and permanently closed the achievement gap,” he said to WFAE.
Boston Globe

Boston School Committee member to temporarily lead board after previous chair’s abrupt resignation

By James Vaznis Globe Staff, Updated June 9, 2021, 3:17 p.m.

Boston School Committee member Michael O’Neill temporarily will take over the leadership of the board, following a text messaging scandal that caused the abrupt resignations of the chair and another member.

O’Neill, who was serving as vice chair, previously led the seven-member board from 2013 to 2017. He is the longest serving member of the mayoral appointed committee and joined the board in 2008 when Thomas M. Menino was mayor.

Born and raised in Jamaica Plain, O’Neill is a graduate of Boston Latin School and currently is serving as chair of the Board of the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of 76 big-city school districts nationwide. The Charlestown resident also has lived in Hyde Park and West Roxbury as an adult before moving to Charlestown about 15 years ago.

The School Committee is expected to hold its next meeting on June 16. O’Neill said on Wednesday that he would defer comment until next week’s meeting.

Former chair Alexandra Oliver-Dávila resigned from the board on Monday, days after fellow member Lorna Rivera quit the board.

Recently released text messages between the two revealed they made disparaging comments about West Roxbury families during a contentious meeting last October, which also led to the downfall of another former chair, Michael Loconto, who was caught on a hot microphone mocking some speakers with Asian-sounding names.

The School Committee at the time was discussing a historic proposal to temporarily drop the entrance test for the city’s three exam schools due to the pandemic. The temporary admission plan, which the committee eventually approved that night, doled out most seats by grades and ZIP codes.

The change was expected to increase the chances of Black and Latino applicants getting in while decreasing the chances of white and Asian students. That night, many Asian and white parents — a number from West Roxbury — complained the changes were unfair and discriminatory.

Early in the meeting Rivera texted to Oliver-Dávila, who was jubilant about making the admission change: “Wait until the white racists start yelling at us.”

“Sick of Westie whites,” Rivera replied. “Me too. I really feel like saying that,” Oliver-Dávila texted.

The messages originally were collected by the city last fall at the request of the Globe, which sought all texts regarding school business that transpired during the meeting. But city officials, who gave the Globe dozens of texts in November, decided to keep secret the most controversial exchanges between Oliver-Dávila and Rivera.

In recent weeks, an anonymous tipster began alerting the media about the existence of the omitted text messages.

The School Committee is getting ready to take up the exam school issue again. A task force is finalizing recommendations to make permanent changes to the admission requirements and the School Committee is expected to vote on it this summer.
On May 27, Dallas ISD’s Board of Trustees recognized Kamila Vargas, a senior at Thomas Jefferson High School, as the 2021 recipient of the Council of Great City Schools’ Green-Garner Scholarship, based on her high academic performance and strong character.

The scholarship accompanied CGCS’ recognition of Dallas ISD Superintendent Michael Hinojosa as its 2021 Superintendent of the Year.

“I feel so lucky to be chosen,” Kamila said. “When I got the news that I had won the scholarship, I felt really happy that they had read my story and that I was being seen.”

Kamila’s parents came from Mexico when they were in their early twenties–her dad from the northern state of Durango and her mother from the southern state of Guerrero– and settled in Dallas.

“This is the only area that we really know; for us, this is home,” said Kamila. However, six years ago their lives were transformed by the sudden deportation of her father. Her mother stepped in to provide for the family and Kamila also assumed a supportive role for her brother.

“It was very tough on all of us, because my dad was the main support of our family,” Kamila said. “But my mom worked really hard, long hours to provide for us. She made sure that we were well mentally and physically, and she inspired me to keep pushing for more opportunities and in my academics.”

Despite the distance, technology has played an important role in keeping the family together. “Thank God, we have these phones, because we are able to see each other’s faces,” said Kamila. “We call each other as much as possible and we spend time telling stories over the phone. It can be a little awkward to not see each other in person, but it also makes me feel like we are together again.”

Kamila’s teachers at Thomas Jefferson High School noticed her commitment from the very beginning. They praised her as a hard-working student, highlighting her work ethic and close attention to detail, as well as her ability to work with others. “Kamila is an amazing student and her hard work and academics prove that she is determined to succeed in her plans,” said Alejandra Chavez, campus advisor for the Education is Freedom higher ed support program.
One element of Kamila’s character that her teachers highlighted is that she’s always presenting her culture in the proudest way that she can. And as a future major in radio and television, first at Dallas College at Brookhaven and then the University of Texas at Austin, Kamila wants to help transform the way Latinos are portrayed in popular media.

“I really want to see us being something other than drug dealers or housemaids or gardeners. I want to show that we have stories in which we are the main characters,” she said.

“I’ve been living in an area where there are mainly Hispanics and Latinos. So I haven’t really struggled with my identity of being Latina. And I find that I am lucky to have that,” Kamila added. “I do realize that I am a minority in the United States and I feel more proud to be from Mexico, or that my parents are from Mexico. I still feel connected, even though I haven’t visited Mexico in years.”

Finally, like every other senior at TJ, Kamila’s last year was marked by the destruction of their original campus in 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the shared experiences helped them rebuild their community. “It was really tough, and we have gone through a lot of issues,” said Kamila. “But that’s okay, it was tough, but we worked it through. Like we always do.”
Jenkins named chair of Council of Great City Schools board

The Orange County Public Schools superintendent will lead the council’s board of directors for the next year.

by: Danielle Hendrix Associate Editor

Orange County Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Barbara Jenkins has been named chair of the Council of the Great City Schools’ board of directors.

For the next year, Jenkins will lead the 150-member board, which is comprised of the superintendent and a school board member from each of the 75 big-city school districts represented by the council.

The council and its member school districts work to help students meet the highest standards and become successful and productive members of society. It also aims to keep lawmakers, the media and the public informed about the progress and problems in big-city schools.

Jenkins has served as OCPS superintendent since 2012. As new chair of the council, she succeeds Michael O’Neill, vice-chairman of the Boston School Committee for Boston Public Schools.

Kelly Gonez, school board president for the Los Angeles Independent School District, will be the new chair-elect. William Hite Jr., superintendent of the School District of Philadelphia, will take over the secretary-treasurer role.

“The Council of the Great City Schools is extremely fortunate to have Jenkins, a recognized education leader, as its next chair,” said Council Executive Director Ray Hart. “The wealth of knowledge and expertise Jenkins and her leadership team brings will provide important direction and guidance to urban schools as they prepare to resume in-person learning this fall, as well as develop plans to effectively spend federal COVID-19 relief funds to address student needs.”
Aurora school board grants itself greater say in issues of school closures, layoffs, and more

By Yesenia Robles  Jul 20, 2021, 7:16pm MDT

The Aurora school board will now have more say about some district decisions.

A board vote Tuesday requires Superintendent Rico Munn to communicate with the board and consider its input 60 days before asking for a vote on certain issues. The new rule will apply to decisions about the budget, school closures or boundary changes, labor negotiation agreements, contracts that will cost 5% or more of the district budget, and any request to reduce staffing. The board’s selection and evaluation of its superintendent and any changes to the district’s goals are also covered under the new process.

In public discussions, board members and the consultant they worked with described the new process as a tweak to the framework governing the relationship between the board and the superintendent; that framework was approved in the last year.

Big changes to board governance may determine whether Munn stays in the district. If Aurora’s board strays too far from its policy governance model, which grants the superintendent most managerial control, Munn could consider the changes a termination of his contract. He would have to give the board 30 days notice before leaving.

Over the past year, tensions have risen between the board and the superintendent, as the board overturned district plans and voted down Munn’s request to give employees notice that a reduction in staff could be coming, following existing policies. Instead, the district had to plan to create jobs for displaced employees who hadn’t yet secured employment.

Some board members said they didn’t like feeling pressured to approve all of Munn’s plans but were told that under the model of policy governance, the board is to entrust district operations to the superintendent and enforce their authority through creating policies, not by interfering in day-to-day plans.

A consultant from the Council of Great City Schools, AJ Crabill, helped craft the language approved Tuesday after talking with individual board members and realizing they actually wanted some tweaks and not to throw out the whole previous framework as had been considered earlier.

Joshua Starr, a former superintendent and the CEO of PDK International, a professional organization for educators, said Aurora’s new rules seemed “overly prescriptive.”
He added that communication between a superintendent and its board is necessary, especially with large issues as the ones flagged for additional board say. But that rigid timelines might cause delays in addressing issues.

“On the surface, you can say there’s some good stuff,” Starr said. “But it smacks to me of a bad relationship and the desire of the board to do a gotcha on the superintendent.”

One issue that the board will not have additional control over is the creation of new positions. Board member Nichelle Ortiz had requested that it be added to the list.

Crabill said the majority of the board did not want control over hiring or firing individuals and that some of this authority would already be built into the board’s approval of the budget.

Previously, the board had discussed whether they should have more say in vetting contracts or partnerships. Some on the board wanted the district to consider partnering with a local university that had approached individual members.

The consultant advised the board against vetting partnerships and contracts.
Atlanta school district to host academy for potential board candidates

By Vanessa McCray, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
July 28, 2021

Atlanta Public Schools will hold an informational session for prospective board candidates ahead of the November election.

All nine Atlanta school board seats are up for grabs on Nov. 2.

APS will host a board governance academy from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday. The event will include a discussion of governance practices and provide information about the district.

The Georgia School Boards Association and the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of the country’s biggest urban public school districts, will participate. Interested participants can register online for the free event.

Those who want to run for a board seat can place their names on the ballot during the qualifying period from Aug. 17-20.
Wayne Walters, a longtime school leader and former teacher, will lead the state’s second-largest district until a search to permanently fill the position begins in December.

"Dr. Walters is no stranger to us," said board president Sylvia Wilson. "We know firsthand that his commitment to Pittsburgh Public Schools and the City of Pittsburgh is unwavering." And she lauded him for "assuming this responsibility at a time when the District needed stabilization and healing."

Walters replaces superintendent Anthony Hamlet, whose tenure ends this week. Hamlet resigned earlier this month after the state’s Ethics Commission released a report that found he violated the ethics law by improperly accepting travel reimbursements and honorariums for appearances. Hamlet repaid the district but called the situation a distraction that he wanted the district to move past.

"When there’s an opportunity to serve, I want to step up," said Walters. "Children’s lives are on the line, and we need to elevate the quality of teaching and accelerate learning for all students."

The board unanimously approved the appointment, which lasts for one year or until a permanent superintendent begins work, during a Wednesday legislative session. But it will wait to begin a search for a permanent replacement until new board members are sworn in. Two seats are contested and will be determined by the Nov. 2 election.

In the meantime, when Walters takes the reins next week, he will inherit a district whose operations have been taxed by the coronavirus and staffing shortages. The district continues to struggle to find transportation to get all kids to school, faces a looming budget shortfall and is working to make sure all students have technology in case a coronavirus outbreak requires a shift to remote learning.

But many district insiders and observers have been hoping he would take the post. Walters, a current assistant superintendent, reported to Hamlet’s executive cabinet but has roots in the district that extend decades before Hamlet arrived to Pittsburgh.

Interim Leader

Walters began his career with the city schools in 1991 as a teacher at King Elementary School on the North Side. He went on to be the principal of Northview Heights Elementary School and the Frick International Studies Academy.
Walters was the first principal of the Barack Obama Academy of International Students 6-12 when it opened in the former Peabody High School building in East Liberty in 2009.

In 2017 Walters was appointed Superintendent of Professional Development and Special Programming to “ensure the district impacts student outcomes by increasing teacher knowledge through a cohesive system of instructional support,” according to a district release.

A native of the Virgin Islands, Walters came to Pittsburgh at the age of 16 to study music at Carnegie Mellon University. According to a district biography, he later received he a Masters’ degree in Music Education/Technology from Duquesne University; and a Doctor of Education from Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

A district release noted that Walters is known for leading professional development as a certified trainer and facilitator, and his previous post stems from a decision early in Hamlet’s tenure to commission a comprehensive evaluation of the district by the Council of Great City Schools. The report highlighted the district’s lack of professional development.

Calls for transparency

Though the search for a permanent superintendent will not begin until this winter, a coalition of education advocates has already asked the board for a transparent search process for the permanent position. Earlier this week, nearly 200 signed a statement composed by Black Women For A Better Education asking for transparency. BW4BE formed in response to what its founders called the district’s slow and inadequate move to remote learning in 2020. The group called for the board to not renew Hamlet’s contract last year. When the board did approve a new contract, BW4BE formed a political action committee and ran a slate of school board candidates.

Incumbent Sala Udin and newcomers Gene Walker and Tracey Reed won the primary elections. Walker and Reed will again challenge incumbents Veronica Edwards and Terry Kennedy -- who will appear on the ballot as Republicans -- in the November election.

The group has asked the district to form a committee of diverse families and stakeholders to collaborate with the board while writing a job description and during the search process. And it said the next superintendent should meet requirements that include:

- Success in overcoming achievement gaps and recognizing historical inequities in public education

- Ethical decision making

- Fiscal responsibility

- Transparency

- Fairness in hiring and promotion decisions
- Success in collaborating with board members and stakeholders

- Success in educating complex learning

“...success in educating complex learning...”

“...A majority of PPS students are Black and Brown and this District has for years failed in its obligation to educate all of its students at a high level,” the BW4BE statement read. “We need a leader with a plan to both close gaps in opportunities and outcomes and attract new families to Pittsburgh schools through a competent administration and stewardship of our abundant resources.”
COUNCIL REPORTS AND REVIEWS
Hillsborough school cuts become real as workers get news of jobs ending

Many will find new positions in the district’s hiring pool, but hundreds won’t as the district slashes its budget. “Principals are frustrated.” Course offerings, class schedules and careers will be impacted as the Hillsborough County school system prepares to cut its workforce by about 1,000 positions.

By Marlene Sokol
Published Apr. 9
Updated Apr. 9

TAMPA — The Hillsborough County School District notified hundreds of employees this week of job cuts that will affect class schedules, course offerings and decades-long careers.

Dozens of assistant principals will see their positions cut, leaving them with few prospects for the “soft landing” of another job in the school system, said Ray Bonti, executive director of the Hillsborough Association of School Administrators.

Teachers are being directed to a hiring pool that may, or may not, have positions for which they are qualified. In some cases, they will take jobs without the proper certification, agreeing to earn those credentials while on the job.

But no one can say how many will be leave the school district for lack of a suitable placement. Earlier in the week, teachers’ union executive director Stephanie Baxter-Jenkins predicted that “several hundred will probably end up in that situation.”

On Friday, she said the union is still working to protect jobs, but added, “We will filing be several grievances in response to the way things are being handled.”

For Jeff Woollard, an economics and government teacher at Jefferson High, it was the second such trip to the hiring pool in two years. As a low-seniority teacher, he also lost his last position at Spoto High.

“I’ve been having a lot of conversations with my principal,” Woollard said. “I’m telling him I really want to be here, I really want to be here. Because I’m a football coach and a teacher here, I’m hopeful and confident that I can come back.”

Mary Hoover, an art teacher at two elementary schools in Plant City, was also headed for the pool. So she started job-hunting and was offered a position in Virginia, where she used to live. Her Hillsborough job was saved at the last minute but, after a similar scare
in the fall, she did not want to remain in such an insecure situation. So she took the job in Virginia.

“It’s the most horrible thing to be told, after 23 years as a teacher, that I’m a unit and there’s no place to put me,” Hoover said. “They talk about relationships with kids, but they don’t foster the relationships with us.”

Hillsborough’s leaders, under superintendent Addison Davis, say they are trying to correct a budget imbalance that goes back nearly a decade, caused largely by the district’s past reliance on short-term grants. The grants ran out, but the positions remained.

A study by the Council of the Great City Schools, an organization of large urban districts, found the district was over-staffed relative to like-sized districts by 3,000 positions.

While not disputing the need for reform, critics are taking issue with the timing of the cuts, and the way they are being carried out. Teachers and school-based administrators, who are also being cut, just went through 13 months of distance learning, food distribution and COVID-19 protocols, including contact tracing and heightened mental health needs.

“Our leaders came to schools every day while students, teachers and other staff members were provided the option of working remotely,” says the latest letter from the administrators’ association.

In the letter, the organization took issue with Davis’ plan to save $3.5 million by having 12-month employees take four furlough days this June.

Bonti is also troubled that as many as 52 assistant principals will lose their jobs under a new staffing formula. Many were recruited into their positions because they showed leadership potential. Now, he said, they will not be able to seek classroom positions until after the teachers have their turn.

These are not people who earn $150,000 or $300,000 a year, he said, but usually between $60,000 and $80,000, or less than some teachers.

Bonti and Baxter-Jenkins say the impact of the cuts will be far-reaching. Students will be without specialty classes they looked forward to, or taught by instructors who are not experts in the topic. Class sizes will be larger as the district conforms more tightly to the state-imposed caps. Preparation time will be stretched thin as teachers take on new assignments.

“You’re shortchanging kids because, for teachers, it’s hard enough to differentiate in class with 26 kids with different needs,” Baxter-Jenkins said. “I have not yet heard a teacher or principal say we have more than enough adults on campus.”
As of late Friday, not all School Board members had seen details of the cuts, and the district was preparing to disseminate the information.

District spokeswoman Tanya Arja said that “not all schools are being cut. Some are adding positions. This is all based on student enrollment and programmatic needs.”

Arja also said counseling jobs, which were a concern by many, have been restored with the help of federal mental health funding.

Arja said school principals have been involved in the entire cutting process. Through their meetings and appeals, they kept the cuts down to about 1,000, from an early count of 1,600.

But Bonti said morale has dropped among his members.

“Principals are frustrated,” he said. “Principals are scared. Principals feel communication has not been to the level that they can plan well and facilitate some of the things that are being asked of them.”

Ultimately, critics say, the moves could weaken the district’s position as non-government charter schools compete for top student and teaching talent.

“Facebook served me three ads today about charter school hiring,” Baxter-Jenkins said.
Is the Assistant Principal the Most Overlooked, Undervalued Person at School?

By Denisa R. Superville — April 14, 2021

Are assistant principals the most overlooked, undervalued people in schools? While their numbers have exploded over the last 25 years, schools have little to no idea of whether this sizable group of second-in-command administrators influence student learning. Often, they don’t have clearly defined roles. And whether their experience as APs prepares them to become effective principals is not well known or understood.

In a new and sweeping review of decades of research on assistant principals, researchers came to some clear conclusions:

1. There’s no consensus—in theory or practice—on what assistant principals do or should do;
2. Too many APs’ experiences fall short of leading them to the principal’s role, and
3. Districts may be squandering a talent pipeline, especially one filled with more women and people of color.

The upshot?

“It’s time to take stock: what do we know and what do we need to know in this really important role?” said Ellen Goldring, a dean at Peabody College at Vanderbilt University and the lead author of The Role of Assistant Principals: Evidence and Insights for Advancing School Leadership.

Unexplained increase in assistant principals

The number of assistant principals grew from close to 44,000 to nearly 81,000 between the 1990-91 and 2015-16 school years—at about six times the rate of principals, according to the report. The percentage of principals who had previously worked as APs also increased in that period.

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3. Districts may be squandering a talent pipeline, especially one filled with more women and people of color.

A barrier or stepping stone for people of color?

Though the teaching profession is largely female—nearly 80 percent of teachers are women—they were less likely than men to become both APs and principals, according to the report.
The researchers found a higher percentage of people of color serving as APs than as teachers and principals. Just under a quarter of assistant principals were people of color, but they made up only 19 percent of those serving as principals and 13 percent of teachers. (Students of color comprised 34 percent of the enrollment in the six states that were included in this specific study that was part of the larger review.)

And principals of color were more likely to have worked as APs than their white peers and more likely to do so after finishing their leadership preparation programs.

There are a number of possible explanations for why the higher numbers of women and people of color in the AP role doesn’t transfer to the principalship.

One is who gets into the pipeline. Since teachers often decide to go into administration on their own or at the encouragement of district leaders and principals, it’s possible that district leaders and principals are not steering women and people of color toward the principalship, Goldring said.

While there is little research to explain fully this phenomenon, the authors posit that discrimination in hiring as well as access to mentoring could also play a role.

It’s also possible that Black assistant principals—particularly Black men—who are often steered toward student discipline, may not be getting the instructional leadership experience necessary for the principal’s job, Mollie Rubin, a research assistant professor at Vanderbilt and a co-author, said during a panel discussion and presentation of the report’s findings.

The new report affirms some findings from a recent study that the Council of the Great City Schools, the organization that represents some of the nation’s largest school districts, found when it looked at APs and principals in its member districts, said Michael Casserly, the executive director.

But there were also some key differences, Casserly said.

While the new report said that big-city and other large districts offered more professional development and mentoring opportunities for APs, the council’s research found something quite different. In its districts, there was little coaching and mentoring for assistant principals, few PD opportunities for principals on how to mentor APs, and a dearth of PD tailored to or differentiated for APs, Casserly said.

And while the ranks of school leadership were more diverse in the big cities, they did not fully reflect students. Black principals and assistant principals come close to matching Black student enrollment, but Hispanic school leaders still fall short of mirroring the districts’ share of Hispanic students.

More diversity could be the result of districts and schools drawing candidates from a wide pool that includes central office staff, instructional coaches, department chairs, and teacher-leaders, Casserly said. But, he said, there’s not enough research to fully answer the question.

**Assistant principals as ‘co-pilots’**

Who is selected to be principal is part of the problem, said Beverly Hutton, the chief program
officer at the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Understanding—and reducing—the barriers that prevent Black APs and women from moving up the ladder could lead to greater equity and diversity to the field, said Mariesa Herrmann, a senior researcher at Mathematica and one of the report’s authors.

Equity audits to identify barriers can help districts address this issue, as well as examining data on who has access to mentoring and who is selected to pursue leadership roles, Rubin said. District leaders can also ensure that APs have equitable experiences to hone their managerial as well as instructional leadership skills.

Hutton said APs should be treated as “principals in training” or as the lead principal’s “co-pilot” and provided with training and job experiences to match those roles.

A key finding from the report highlighted the disconnect between pre-service programs and the real world: Prep programs prepare candidates to work as principals even though the majority of graduates work as APs upon completion of their training.

**Ideas to support assistant principals**

The report comes with some clear recommendations on how districts can better support APs and bring some coherence to the role, including:

- Develop standards and tasks that are consistent with the AP job and responsibilities;
- Create evaluations for APs that are separate from those for principals;
- Ensure principals have the skills, training, and professional development to mentor APs and that they offer APs experiences to develop their leadership skills;
- Prioritize people of color and women in leadership pipelines and plans.

Other highlights from the report:

- It’s unclear whether the assistant principal’s role is a career goal itself or a stepping-stone to the principalship.
- The actual responsibilities of the assistant principal are often at the discretion of the school’s principal—meaning that two assistant principals in the same district can leave their jobs with vastly different experiences and readiness for the next step in their careers. Goldring and colleagues note, however, that recent data indicate APs’ responsibilities, in some cases, are becoming more instructionally-focused, possibly because more detailed teacher evaluation requirements that may lead principals to share those duties with their APs.
- There’s limited empirical evidence that having worked as an AP leads to better school outcomes or effectiveness as a principal. But there’s emerging research to suggest that working as an AP in their current school, in a more effective school, or being an effective AP could improve student outcomes. But the research is “nascent,” Rubin said.
- Assistant principals can play an important role in improving school culture and equity through their work with students and families.

The researchers started from a base of 103 qualitative and quantitative studies and fully coded 79 studies. The report also relies on data from the National Teacher and Principal Staffing Survey and longitudinal assistant principal and principal data from Pennsylvania and Tennessee and job descriptions from districts.
Assistant principals are in a pivotal position to shape school culture and student outcomes if the role is carefully considered. Prep programs, for example, can work with districts to sequence courses to match the work that APs are doing. A residency model, similar to those in the medical profession, may hold promise, Goldring said.

“This isn’t an assistant to the principal; these are assistant principals—key school leadership positions,” Goldring said.

“We hope the report support the people in those positions as well as those who want to and aspire to be principals have the opportunities and experiences needed to move forward.”
How did Hillsborough County Public Schools end up in their dire financial situation?

By: McKenna King
Posted at 4:42 PM, Apr 23, 2021 and last updated 6:17 PM, Apr 23, 2021

TAMPA, Fla. — In an open letter Thursday, Florida Education Commissioner Richard Corcoran said Hillsborough County Schools’ finances are at a “point of crisis” and he would take emergency action if the situation doesn’t change.

Now a big question on the top of minds is "how did Hillsborough County Public Schools get into this situation, and who’s to blame?"

Hillsborough County Public Schools is the eighth largest school district in the United States and the third-largest district in the state of Florida. In an audit requested by newly-elected Superintendent Addison Davis last year, findings revealed the district was warned about the dire financial situation back in 2016.

That audit was conducted by an outside group, the Council of the Great City Schools, and it came with recommendations to get the district back on track and helps piece together just how Hillsborough County Public Schools ended up with an over $100 million deficit.

“It’s the largest deficit that any superintendent in the state of Florida has ever had to address,” said Hillsborough County Public Schools Superintendent Addison Davis, during an interview on April 8th, before any teacher cuts were officially announced.

When asked if Superintendent Davis was aware of just how dire the financial situation was before he was elected to his position, he responded: “Absolutely not, you know, I knew openly that we had work to do. Instructionally, I knew that we had the most underperforming schools in the state of Florida, and I gravitate toward that. This is what I do, I’m an instructional leader, I love it. And that was a challenge I’m still excited to be able to address once we get through the pandemic, but openly the financials have been somewhat of a canyon in this work, and we’re just trying to work our way out of it,” said Superintendent Davis.

Shortly after that interview, the first teacher cuts and reassignments came.

“My heart just sunk. I’m like, ‘what is happening right now,’ said Cece Gaddy, a physical education teacher for Hillsborough County Schools.

Gaddy is currently working to update her resume, unsure of what the future holds for her within the district.
“It is very hard. Especially when the kids are asking, ‘Coach Gaddy, I can’t wait to have your class next year, am I gonna have you as a teacher next year!’ you know, what am I supposed to say, like ‘hey, by the way, the county doesn’t want me here because they can’t afford me,” said Gaddy.

It’s a situation dozens of others are facing as the district works to make up the shortfall.

But the financial crisis did not happen overnight.

Digging through the October 2020 audit, it outlined structural imbalances from past administrations; things it says the district had been forewarned of back in 2016.

Things like:

- Revenue losses due to enrollment declines (resulting from the expansion of charter schools, demographics shifts, and the impact of COVID) have not been offset by related reductions in school staffing."
- Past leadership did not adjust staffing levels or find new funding sources when grant funds expired or other special funding sources had dissipated. 4
- The matrix staffing model, using existing state staffing norms and current student FTE data (noted above), has identified 3,000 excess positions.
- Expenditure increases from salary raises have not been tied to identified ongoing sources of revenue (e.g., the School Board approved salary increases in the fall of 2019).
- HCPS has backfilled revenue declines and expenditure increases by transferring onetime resources from Capital Funds to the General Fund and then consuming the General Fund balance. To illustrate
  - During the past six years, the district made the following transfers from the Capital Fund to its General Fund to backfill budgetary shortfalls totaling $197.0 million.

But the audit also uncovered that the district has “a strong new leadership team and is on a trajectory to achieve sustained financial stability.”

However, not everybody agrees with the new leadership's plan.

“We’re at a particular point in this year where, I’ve already cut district administration, as soon as I got in, close to 100 positions. In September and October, I cut over 600 positions at that particular time. We’re in the process now of, I cut district budget, I cut overtime, we’re looking at surplus property. Myself and my cabinet and administrators are taking furlough days to help us financially,” said Superintendent Davis.

Tough decisions that will likely lead to more cuts in the months ahead.

The district has implemented what they call a “soft-landing” approach, where they’ll be eliminating positions in three stages:
1. one-third in the current school year,
2. one-third in the first semester of FY 2021-2022, and
3. one-third in the second semester of FY 2021-2022.

The audit says the plan “relies heavily on the elimination of vacant positions, natural attrition, and the reassignment of qualified staff.”
The Fastest-Improving City School Districts Aren’t the Ones You Might Expect

By Stephen Sawchuk — July 01, 2021

Notably, the gains are concentrated both in districts well known for years of improvement efforts, like Miami-Dade and Boston, as well as in some, such as Cleveland, Dallas, and Detroit, that have received much less national attention, according to the study, which was released earlier this week by the Council of the Great City Schools.

The District of Columbia posted impressive gains, leading the CGCS to conclude that it is improving faster than any other major city school system in the country.

The study uses statistical methods to facilitate comparisons among some of the nation’s largest and most-diverse school districts. It takes into account the changing demographics of students in each city over time to rule out other factors that are often cited for academic gains or losses, such as gentrification, increasing poverty rates and homelessness, and changing proportions of children learning English.

The research is based on data from the federally administered National Assessment of Educational Progress.

We knew urban school districts were generally improving. So why is this new?

Yes, previous NAEP releases have shown large cities generally narrowing gaps between Black and white students, and between disadvantaged students and their more-advantaged peers. (These opportunity gaps are largely the product of unequal access to resources, good teaching, and other factors that are linked to student achievement.)

Here’s why the new study matters: It shows more clearly how much each school system appears to improve outcomes for students despite the challenges. That’s important because it means other, similarly situated school systems can visit them to pinpoint the strategies they used.

And it also provides a better measure of improvement than simply looking at changes in raw test scores, by taking into account each district’s starting point and how far achievement grew. While the absolute performance of these districts is still lower than the national average, some districts are moving students along much faster and farther than others.

Historically, said Ray Hart, the executive director of the CGCS and the number-cruncher on this study, “we’ve given credit to schools based on the population they serve. What we
haven’t done is given credit to schools based on the education they give to the population they serve.”

There is one caveat: The study is limited to the 2009 to 2019 time period. 2019 was the last year in which the NAEP was administered. The report therefore does not include any declines caused by the pandemic, which caused massive disruption to teaching and learning.

Just how does the study account for improvement?

Hart took all of the NAEP data from the last few reading and math administrations in grades 4 and 8, and used statistical methods to predict how students in large city districts were expected to do, including for each demographic category—Black students, students with disabilities, English-learners, and so on.

Then he compared this to how those students actually performed. The difference between expected and actual performance gives an estimate of the impact the large city districts are having.

The study frames this as an “effect,” and states it in terms of scale-score points. An effect of three, for example, means that the district on average moved students three points higher in that subject than it was expected to, based on demographics. (There are currently 27 of these city districts that participate in NAEP, so comparisons are limited to those.)

All of this information is compared to how students in all other schools—public and private—performed.

Take Detroit, for example. In 4th grade math, it still has a very low level of achievement overall, a 232 scale score on a 0 to 500 scale. (The average for all non-city schools in 2019 was 242 points.)

But between 2009 and 2019, Detroit’s “effect”—how much more its scale score in that subject changed relative to expectations—grew by nearly nine points, much higher than the point-and-a-half increase posted by all other districts in the aggregate. It also outpaced the large city schools as a whole, which as a group weren’t any more or less effective than predicted.

Which districts are standouts here?

The report lays out answers to this complicated question graphically, so do take a look at it. But here goes with a short list of highlights.
For fast improvement, the District of Columbia really tops the list, with statistically significant “effect” increases in all four grade and subject combinations: 4th and 8th grade math and reading.

Many critics over the years have questioned whether this improvement has something to do with the city’s demographics, which became wealthier and whiter over this time period. But because the analysis takes demographics into account, it rules that out as a factor. Instead, the city’s gains appear to be something it’s doing educationally. (It has invested significantly—and controversially—in efforts to improve teacher quality and curriculum.)

Detroit is another one to watch. It became dramatically more effective at boosting learning between 2009 and 2019, with significant impact in all grade and subject combinations except 4th grade reading. That occurred even while the city got even poorer in the wake of the Great Recession.

(In 2021, Education Week recognized Detroit’s superintendent and its assistant superintendent of family and community relations for their work rebuilding ties with parents. The district is also well known for its work to improve its secondary reading and literacy curriculum.)

Of course, both of those two districts had more room to improve because they started way behind many of the others.

There are also are some districts that are notable for sustaining their effectiveness over time. Boston and Miami-Dade are both good examples.

In Miami-Dade, well known for the unusually long, 13-years-and-counting tenure of its superintendent, the district not only posted scores higher than that of all other schools in all the grade and subject combinations in 2019; it also got more effective in three out of four grade and subject combinations.

And year after year, students in Boston performed higher than they are statistically expected to in all four grade and subject combinations. (The city has more recently been under scrutiny for uneven results for its Black students.)

There are the “dark horses” as well—cities that don’t tend to get as much attention for their work. Cleveland became more effective in boosting both 4th grade math and reading, for instance, and is improving faster in 8th grade math than the average of all other schools. Atlanta and Charlotte, N.C., both improved their effectiveness in the teaching of 8th grade math.
There’s some not-great news in the findings, too.

The Philadelphia district has gradually lost ground. In 2009, it had an effect of about 5 points in 8th grade math, for example. But over time, it’s moved in the opposite direction. Now, the district “effect” in that grade actually is about 9 points below where the statistical projections say it should be.

Houston has also lost ground by having less impact in two grade/subject areas and stalling in the others. (Even so, it is still outperforming expectations, according to the projections.)

Other cities, like Fresno, Calif., just seem to have a hard time getting traction. That district got less effective in 8th grade math and didn’t change significantly in the other categories.

**How does this data square with other NAEP trends?**

One of the most persistent, worrisome trends of late has been a decline in overall scores largely due to what one federal official called a bifurcation in performance: The downturn is concentrated among average and low-performing students, even as the highest-performing students gain ground.

The CGCS data isn’t broken out in terms of performance quintiles, but the organization agrees that this is a concerning trend that warrants additional research.

**Do we know why some of these districts seem to improve faster than others?**

Overall, the data are encouraging, especially in some of the most-troubled districts. The data generally confirm, for example, Chicago’s remarkable progress over the past decade. That is a long cry indeed, from the 1980s, when then-U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett famously deemed it the worst district in the nation.

But in trying to figure out why, we run squarely into one of the difficulties of NAEP data: It’s not really set up to answer cause-and-effect questions. We may know these districts are doing something right, but we’re not clear about what the “something” is.

Testing what works in school districts is hard to do in any case, because from a research perspective, you’d ideally want to compare the set of strategies you’re interested in against some business-as-usual set of policies.
Still, the CGCS did some case study research to see if they could identify common patterns among the districts. It also visited two unnamed districts that didn’t have as good results to see if there was anything there that stood out.

What it found maybe can best be described as a kind of overall coherence: Districts that seemed to be improving had strong, stable leadership focused on teaching and learning. They gave lots of supports on curriculum, standards, and teaching to their teachers. They focused on improving their teachers’ and principals’ capabilities and invested in engaging parents and community members in their efforts.

(This is nearly identical to the set of principles that researchers have found for improving individual city schools.)

But there was one other common theme: The districts tended to go all in on their instructional plans at scale, rather than piloting things here and there.
EDITORIAL:

Setting the record straight on critical race theory in education

Tuesday, July 6, 2021 | 2 a.m.

Bravo to the Clark County School District for putting the focus where it belongs in the national discussion about critical race theory — on the need for young Americans to know the good, the bad and the in-between about our nation’s history when it comes to racial issues.

Following a recent school board meeting that got out of hand over the issue, CCSD relayed a statement to the community Wednesday supporting classroom instruction on matters of race and their impact on American history and society. The statement was issued by Council of the Great City Schools, an educational advocacy organization that includes CCSD and 76 other large urban school districts in the U.S.

It’s a well-reasoned and well-written perspective on the matter, authored by CGCS Executive Director Michael Casserly. We believe it’s worth republishing in its entirety, and we strongly encourage everyone in our community to read it.

Before we do, though, we would like to reiterate our support for CCSD’s stance on the issue.

For our children to understand how we got to our current place on racial relations, and to avoid making the mistakes of our past and to forge a better future, it’s vital to give them an unblinking and objective view of the role that race played in our history and how it continues to shape our society.

As Casserly intimates, the whitewashed curriculum favored by the political right wing is not only misleading but dangerous. To wallpaper over racist attitudes among the nation’s founders and influential leaders, ignore how white privilege and racism disadvantaged Americans of color, and downplay the evils of slavery is to cheat our children our of a comprehensive understanding of their country and leave them with mistaken notions about our progress toward equality.

Those in a panic about students learning the history of our nation’s struggle with race issues are very much like Holocaust deniers — it’s a bigoted effort to expunge history of crimes in order to deny an entire people key parts of their story and identity.

Unfortunately, the far right has politicized this issue and used it as an opportunity to fearmonger. More unfortunate yet, some Americans have taken the bait — including the parents who, during a discussion at the recent CCSD board meeting about the district’s anti-racism policy, disrupted the meeting with rants about critical race theory (CRT).
Let’s set the facts straight.

No, critical race theory is not about scapegoating white kids for the nation’s problems or forcing them into thinking they’re racists. It’s about enlightening American children of all ethnicities, and giving them the understanding they need to keep our nation moving forward toward equality and fairness for all populations.

Again, we think Casserly states the case well. Here is his statement, in its entirety.

**Statement by Michael Casserly, executive director of Council of the Great City Schools**

While the arc of history may bend toward justice, the unfolding story of social change is often a series of fits and starts, a steady volley of progress and pushback. In the wake of the George Floyd killing a year ago, America embarked on a new chapter of introspection and dialogue around race and society. The pushback was inevitable, and it has come in the form of opposition to the teaching of critical race theory. Never mind that elementary and secondary schools do not, for the most part, teach critical race theory; there is political advantage to be had. Critics and some state legislatures have now bundled nearly every discussion involving race and equity under this heading and cast it as divisive, unpatriotic and un-American. In fact, our schools have a moral and patriotic obligation to teach a balanced and comprehensive history of our nation, including events that others have hidden or conveniently avoided.

Education, by definition, should equip us with all the facts and information we need to form our own opinions and perspective. All the facts, not some of the facts. Not just the facts that make us proud. Otherwise, it is just indoctrination. The complete, unabridged story of American history is one of triumph and of tragedy, of great ingenuity and immense injustice, and we need to talk about both. That means that when we talk about race and our history, we need to not only celebrate the contributions of African Americans to music, sports, cuisine, language and literature, medicine, and business throughout the years, but also to explore the attitudes that led to hundreds of lynchings that occurred up to modern times. We need to highlight the contributions of Hispanic Americans to the agriculture, art and aerospace industries, but include the study of the Melendez case (a precursor to Brown vs. Board of Education) and the systematic seizure of acreage and property from Mexican American landowners in Texas in the early 20th century. We need to cover the contributions of the Navajo code talkers to winning World War II, and the horrors of the Trail of Tears and the systematic murder of the Osage for oil head rights. And it is as important to study the contributions of Chinese Americans to building the Transcontinental Railroad as understanding the racism behind the Chinese Exclusion Act. Our history is also not complete without an understanding of both the contributions of and oppression of peoples of differing faiths, gender orientations, disabilities and languages.

If our history makes some people uncomfortable, then so be it. If some people need to be reminded that everyone was born equal and that no one is superior to anyone else, then let’s remind them. If some people are surprised to learn that our culture and institutions, including our own schools, have advantaged some and disadvantaged others, then it’s about time. This is not an unfortunate byproduct — this is the purpose of education. And it is perhaps the most patriotic act possible. Because if we believe that our children are heirs to a great nation that is striving to be better and more equitable, then we need to make sure that they understand both the history of that nation, and the important role they will play in determining its future. In our quest for a more perfect union, a great nation is not afraid of or threatened by this history or the discussion of it. On the contrary, it is our ongoing dialogue and steady — if not smooth — progress toward justice and equality that makes us great.
M-DCPS Lauded for Making Progress in Mitigating the Effects of Poverty

July 8, 2021 Doral, Miami-Dade Schools, News

DORAL, FL - The Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) has released a report describing how well large public school districts are mitigating the effects of poverty and other barriers.

The study, *Mirrors or Windows: How Well Do Large City Public Schools Overcome the Effects of Poverty and Other Barriers?* uses data collected over the past ten years in reading and mathematics at the fourth- and eighth-grade levels from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to answer the question of whether “schools are windows of opportunity – helping overcome poverty and other barriers – or they are mirrors of society's inequities.”

Data was also used from the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) of NAEP. The Council initiated TUDA in 2000 so the nation’s largest school systems can track their progress against other cities, states, and the nation.

“*Miami-Dade County Public Schools* (M-DCPS) believes that all children deserve a quality education,” said Superintendent of Schools Alberto M. Carvalho. “We are proud of the tireless efforts of our team of educational professionals and the ongoing support of families, which has propelled M-DCPS students to achieve and soar academically and personally. This report strongly validates our work over the past decade in providing a window of opportunity for all children that is unparalleled.”

The study found that Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) not only scored higher on NAEP than Large City School averages in all areas, but the District also outperformed All Other Schools, public and private, nationally in 4th grade Reading and Mathematics.

In addition, “district effects” were calculated, representing the difference between the district's actual test scores and predicted scores based on demographic attributes of the students tested that are known to impact achievement. M'DCPS’ district effects exceeded that of All Other Schools in 4th and 8th grade Reading and Math. Miami-Dade emerged as the only District to excel in the top rankings for both average scores and district effects in three of the four NAEP assessments.
Overall, the study further reveals that the urban public schools did accelerate the performance of their students to a degree not seen in the comparison group, which included non-urban public and private schools.

“The significant accomplishments highlighted in this report reflect the outstanding work of Miami-Dade’s educators. I am proud of the consistent academic growth demonstrated by our students,” said Perla Tabares Hantman, Miami-Dade School Board Chair.

“As illustrated by the data highlighted in this report, our District continuously aims to provide students with the resources and support they need to excel. On behalf of our entire School Board, I commend all who made this possible.”

M-DCPS showed results that were above expectations in fourth- and eighth grade reading and mathematics in 2019 and in most years over the 10-year period.

Moreover, the District demonstrated some of the largest overall gains. M-DCPS district effects ranked first among TUDA districts, higher than Large City and All Other Schools in grade 4 Mathematics and Reading and ranked second in both grades in Reading.

- Grade 4 in both Reading and Mathematics exhibited greater than 14-point differences between observed and expected scores, outpacing all other districts in this measurement of accelerating student achievement.
- In 2019, M-DCPS was one of only five districts that showed significant positive district effects in both Reading and Mathematics and at both grade levels.

M-DCPS was also lauded for intentionally focusing investments by community partners on “fragile” schools—aligning those resources to meet student needs—as part its district improvement strategy. In addition to deploying the most effective teachers and leaders to these schools, the District directed greater support and resources to these sites.
A new nationwide report highlights Duval County Public Schools for its work to help students overcome poverty, opportunity gaps and other barriers.

The Council of the Great City Schools, a highly regarded educational advocacy organization, released a study called "Mirrors or Windows?" that aimed to measure cities' progress over the last decade when it comes to if scores are improving among students in urban areas with large concentrations of poverty.

"Our question in this report is a straightforward one: Are urban public schools, which have the largest numbers and concentrations of poor students in the nation, windows or mirrors?" the report explained.

The report highlighted Duval County as one of the 17 areas out of 27 cities being measured that posted "statistically significant positive district effects in 2019."

Other cities and areas similarly spotlighted included Atlanta, Chicago, Denver, the District of Columbia and Miami-Dade County.

“The report reaffirms what is evident from visiting our classrooms. The quality of the instructional experience in our schools is exemplary," Duval Schools Superintendent Diana Greene said. "There are a lot of social ingredients baked into a test score or a school grade, and when you break it down as this report does, you see the work of our teachers, school leaders, and support staff is another reason Duval is such a great place to learn and live."

Methodology
According to the Council of the Great City Schools, the study uses statistical methods to compare the largest and most-diverse school districts across the country.

Factors considered included free or reduced-price lunch eligibility rates, the percentage of family incomes less than $15,000 per year by school ZIP code (6.8% in Duval County), ethnicity and race demographics, English language learner status and parental education.

As noted by Education Week, the report also took into account changes that would impact an urban community over time, like changing demographics, as a way to rule out outside factors that usually get credited for academic gains and losses — like gentrification, increasing poverty rates and homelessness or changing proportions of children who are learning English.

"We’ve given credit to schools based on the population they serve," Ray Hart, executive director of Council of the Great City Schools, told Education Week. "What we haven’t done is given credit to schools based on the education they give to the population they serve."

Still, there are limitations. For instance, the study is limited to National Assessment of Educational Progress data, which was last administered in 2019. For that reason, declines sparked by the coronavirus pandemic are not included.

The results are also based solely on cities and school districts participating in the Trial Urban District Assessment. Duval County Public Schools began participating in 2015, meaning results from 2009 through 2014 could not be compared apples-to-apples like other school districts.

The report used National Assessment of Educational Progress data for fourth-grade and eighth-grade reading and math scores and used statistical methods to predict how students in each demographic group would perform. Those projected numbers were compared to how students actually performed and
the difference between the two results gave estimates of a school district's impact.

"In other words, we created a ‘value-added’ measure or ‘district effect’ using National Assessment of Educational Progress data to determine whether urban school districts are producing enough 'educational torque' to mitigate poverty and other variables to any degree and to ascertain how they were doing it," the report said. "We also look at districts that were not making as much progress and discuss their commonalities. In these ways, we attempt to discern whether public schools, and urban public education, in particular, is a force for upward social mobility or whether it simply reflects and perpetuates the inequities that society creates."

The group says this study may help educators retool their game plans as the coronavirus pandemic calms down in the coming years.

**Duval Schools performs well in fourth and eighth-grade reading**

Duval County Public Schools' performance warranted a few shout-outs throughout the 84-page report.

Specifically, the district was praised for "significant positive district effects in 2019" when it comes to fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade reading.

The district was also highlighted for having "significantly larger district effects" in three grade or subject combinations. Duval County was among nine cities and districts including Dallas, Cleveland, New York City and the District of Columbia.

Still, other areas weren't as strong.

In eighth-grade mathematics, for example, Duval County Schools had a "district effect" of 2.35 in 2019. In comparison, Miami scored a 6.65 in the same year and category, which was praised as significant growth.
"This report reminds us that we still have work to do to ensure every student is successful," said Rachael Tutwiler Fortune, president of the Jacksonville Public Education Fund. "We remain laser focused on partnering with DCPS to drive excellent and equitable outcomes for every student."

Education Week noted that National Assessment of Educational Progress data studies have previously shown opportunity gaps narrowing in large urban areas — which are typically a product of unequal access to resources. However, what's significant about the Council of the Great City Schools report is that it clearly shows how school districts improve despite challenges, taking into account a common starting point and making it easier to identify effective strategies.

As part of the study, the Council of the Great City Schools visited the areas to figure out if there were commonalities in teaching methods and approaches that could inform the work of other major urban school systems.

“While urban school districts have not overcome or mitigated the barriers before them entirely, it is clear from the data in this study that large city schools may be doing a better job of mitigating the effects of poverty, discrimination, language and other barriers than other schools in the country,” Council Executive Director Michael Casserly said.

“We know there is more work to do, but by examining the extent to which urban schools are 'beating the odds' we know that with the right strategies and practices the nation’s large city schools can and do improve, but they can significantly raise student achievement and produce results that defy expectations," Casserly added.

According to the Council, the visits revealed "several common practices" among successful school districts including:

- strong and stable leadership focused on student instruction
- high academic standards and well-defined instructional support
• strong professional development and school-based support structures
• systemwide change
• accountability and a culture of collaboration
• resilience and resourcefulness in the face of adversity
• support for struggling schools and students
• community investments and engagement efforts

"Research has shown that socioeconomic status is — sadly — a major predictor of student achievement, and so the true test of our public schools is how well they’re helping all students thrive, no matter the barriers," Tutwiler Fortune said. "It is a major achievement that Duval County Public Schools are highlighted in this report. Our schools are windows of opportunity."

Superintendent Greene said partnerships, like with the Jacksonville Public Education Fund and other groups, also contribute to closing opportunity gaps.

"The contributions of many community partners also make a big difference in student outcomes," she said. "The findings of this research are a reflection of a community that has come together in an amazing way to support teaching and learning in our schools."
Ishmael Brown Jr. is a stickler for notes when he teaches algebra I to ninth graders at Spring Valley High School in Columbia, South Carolina. After he gives students a problem, he typically walks around and watches how they’re solving it; he wants to see their reasoning with the answer. Not so this year: As of May, only about a sixth of his students were in person and the rest online.

With so many web tools out there that solve math problems, it’s easy for Brown’s online students to find a shortcut to answers and the calculations that go with them. So he has no idea if they’re learning.

Connecting with kids has been a struggle, too. Brown’s virtual students aren’t required to turn on their cameras, so he can’t tell whether they’re paying attention. Few speak up. In person, his classes are fun, and the students engaged: “I relate whatever it is that we’re doing to something closer to real life,” he said.

The effects are showing up in test scores. In his intermediate algebra class — the second semester of algebra I — 30 percent of his students are passing tests, compared with close to 70 percent in previous years. “I really don’t think that they’re growing,” said Brown, who’s also president of the National Tutoring Association. “I think this is a lost school year for most kids.”

Similar stories are coming in from all over the country. Educators and school leaders are scrambling to figure out how to regain ground next year in a course that often makes or breaks students’ life chances.

Later, math is what most often keeps students from graduating from college, experts say. Only half of students who take college algebra score C or higher in the course, a 2015 report by the Mathematical Association of America noted. Math courses are “the
most significant barrier to degree completion in both STEM and non-STEM fields,” the authors concluded.

That means algebra I is also the class that decides whether students get jobs involving science, technology, engineering or math. “Algebra I is the air you breathe to be in STEM,” said Nathan Levenson, a former CEO of a crane-manufacturing company and later a school superintendent in Massachusetts.

For many students it’s been a lonely year, and algebra is tougher to learn while peering at a screen, say teachers and researchers.

Ishmael Brown Jr. introduces a lesson on quadratic formulas. Few students spoke up with questions and comments during algebra I classes this year, say teachers and students. (Ishmael Brown Jr.)

School leaders and teachers are puzzling through a tough equation: how to keep students who missed out on a lot of algebra I content moving through grade-level math next year, usually geometry. Teaching experts say that will mean slowing down to fill in knowledge gaps —detouring from lesson plans, adding extra periods for tutoring, and more. Schools will need to put in “quality time this fall understanding what kids know and what they’re able to do” and then building on that, says Michael Steele, a professor of mathematics education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

At Jackson City School in Kentucky, teacher Jeffrey Coots has had about two-thirds of his algebra I students online all year. Even some of his strongest math students from prior years have struggled to stay motivated working virtually and have gotten behind. He doesn’t know what’s happening at home, and connections are often spotty — the district is located in Breathitt County, one of the nation’s poorest.

“It’s really hard essentially losing a student who you know has just great things ahead of them,” he said. “I’m very worried. I think of math like Legos — you can’t build a house if you don’t have that first foundation.”

Keeping kids connected is just one problem. Teachers don’t get enough training to begin with and certainly haven’t been trained to teach math remotely, said Mark Goldstein, vice president of curriculum and instruction at the nonprofit Center for Mathematics and Teaching. So teachers have been learning new software platforms on the go. In a group of 30 students in an online platform, they can’t watch everyone and check their students’ body language as in the classroom, he said. Breakout rooms are even harder to monitor.

And often teachers haven’t had time to cover anything in depth. Heuvelton Central School in northwestern New York State used a hybrid schedule for middle school and high school most of the year: two groups of students on alternating schedules are in person two days a week each. The other three days they’re on their own to do homework. With only two days a week to present new material, algebra I teacher Eliza Pierce has had to skim — the class isn’t diving into the really hard problems, she said.
When her students hit geometry next year in 10th grade, they’re going to be “shellshocked” if they have to move at the same pace as in past years, she said.

Algebra teacher Eliza Pierce reviews polynomial equations with her in-person and remote students in preparation for end-of-year tests at Heuvelton Central School in northwestern New York State. (Jesse Coburn)

Students, too, have been struggling with all the new software, said Veronica Tenesaca, a tutor with Saga Education, which matches tutors with traditionally underserved students. She reels off the names of four new apps her students have had to learn for their algebra courses.

Even students who have done well working virtually don’t love online learning. Zyonne Reid, a 15-year-old at J.P. Taravella High School in Florida, hasn’t wanted to speak up in her large algebra I class that meets on Microsoft Teams. “Since it’s online, teachers don’t notice you’re struggling,” she said. “And you don’t want to take up the other people’s time by asking a question.”

Hafez Elachkar, 14, goes to Dearborn High School in Michigan. He hated math in previous years but likes his algebra I teacher, who relates what the class is learning to real life, and he’s using some of his algebra to help out in his father’s shoe business. But few students participate or ask questions, he said. When they break out into group work, no one talks except him. He’d never trade in-person math for the online version, he said.

Urban school districts like his were most likely to be fully online this year. Almost 80 percent of city districts planned to start last fall fully remote, versus 34 percent in the suburbs and 13 percent in rural areas, according to an August 2020 report by the University of Washington’s Center on Reinventing Public Education.

Organizations that tutor students in low-income districts see achievement indicators flashing red. Peer Power, a Memphis nonprofit that matches tutors with students in eight area public schools, started 16 years ago with a laser focus on algebra I after a local principal noticed that students who failed the course ended up dropping out of high school.

This year, the group is watching students flounder in algebra despite its help, according to Chris Xa, vice president of the Peer Power Institute at the University of Memphis, which supports Peer Power’s research, funding and training of tutors. He said that by the third quarter of a normal academic year, 50 to 65 percent of kids matched with tutors are getting A’s and B’s in algebra I. This year it’s only 30 percent. UPchieve, a nonprofit that pairs low-income students with free tutors through an online platform, says students have requested 14 times more tutoring sessions in algebra I or II this year than last year.
Ishmael Brown Jr. works through a lesson on quadratic formulas. Few students spoke up with questions and comments during algebra I classes this year, say teachers and students. (Ishmael Brown Jr.)

Districts are scrambling to figure out what to do for the students who have gotten behind. “I think that’s the whole problem: What are we going to do?” said Paul Green, superintendent of the Jackson Independent School District. He’s loath to fail students who have lost ground. But he said there’s no way they’ve gotten the skills to move to higher math. One alternative in his state is repeating the class: In April the Kentucky governor signed a law that lets students retake courses from the current academic year in 2021-22.

It’s not clear that will help — research has shown that having students repeat algebra I doesn’t raise performance.

There’s another way, say math teaching experts. Steele, who studies high school policies and practices related to algebra I, is advising teachers to slow down this fall — a strategy that, confusingly, the U.S. Department of Education and others have labeled “accelerated learning.” It involves schools’ putting extra time into figuring out which concepts kids missed and revisiting those, all the while keeping them at grade-level math.

Steele points to a task teachers could use in next year’s 10th grade geometry class. Students are asked to fold two standard 8.5-by-11-inch pieces of paper to create two rectangular prisms, one taller and thinner, the other shorter and fatter. They fill each with popcorn and soon learn the prisms hold different amounts. (The exercise is from the book “Taking Action: Implementing Effective Mathematics Teaching Practices in Grades 9-12,” published by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.)

The students are then asked to use algebraic formulas for determining volume — which they would have covered in middle school math and algebra I — to explain why. Steele likes the problem because it gives teachers the chance to review algebra concepts. A report last June from the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of large urban school systems, recommended similar strategies.

Mykea Young has used that just-in-time approach with students in her ninth grade algebra I class all year. She teaches at Forest Park High School outside Atlanta, and her students have been online five days a week. One day in February, she launched into an exercise in which students were to graph linear equations. A minute or so in, the lesson foundered — students didn’t remember quadrants, X-axes and Y-axes, concepts that were covered in their middle school math. She dropped her lesson plan, instead pulling up an online graphing tool that let them refresh their skills. “I have to think on my feet,” she said.

Tonya Clarke, K-12 math coordinator for the Clayton County school district where Forest Park High is located, said having teachers fill knowledge gaps like that quickly, as
they arise — while keeping kids at grade-level math — is central to the district’s strategy for getting students back on track next year.

Levenson has mapped out changes in scheduling and personnel to fill those learning gaps. Now a senior adviser at District Management Group, a consulting firm helping school district leaders, he worked with the Louisiana Department of Education on a plan for this fall that involves keeping students at grade-level instruction by building catch-up classes right into the regular school day.

If teachers in a regular class period spot kids having trouble creating equations, those students will be grouped into a catch-up period later in the day in which a strong math teacher gives them help with that skill. Those extra periods could also include tutoring. (A study released in March found that students who received a period of “high-dosage tutoring” — meaning every day or almost every day — learned two to three times as much math as their peers.)

That plan will cost money because it likely means hiring highly qualified teachers to deliver the extra catch-up periods, said Levenson. Those dollars are on the way: The federal American Rescue Plan signed into law in March gives states additional millions to reopen schools and requires districts to devote at least 20 percent of what they get to addressing learning losses.

Slowing down high school math might be just what’s needed now, say some experts. Starting in the early 1990s, schools and parents pushed ever more eighth graders to take algebra I. But studies of district policies requiring eighth grade algebra show they didn’t improve, and often hurt, student achievement in math.

One goal of that early-algebra trend was to get more kids through calculus and onto a STEM degree track. That’s because in the traditional setup, three yearlong courses are required between algebra I and calculus, so getting to calculus by senior year means finishing algebra I by eighth grade. But the pandemic has accelerated a trend away from that rigid model, said Steele: More schools are allowing kids to mix and match math classes later in high school, like taking algebra I and precalculus in the same year.

Giving kids extra tools next year could boost grades and confidence. At J.P. Taravella High School in Florida, Reid struggled with polynomial equations in a class several weeks ago, but got help the next day in a Saga tutoring session that is built into her regular school schedule. How does she feel about doing polynomials now? “I don’t feel great about it, but I know I can do it,” she said.

“Figuring out challenging things makes you feel better,” she added. “It makes you feel invincible.”

This story about algebra was produced by The Hechinger Report, a nonprofit, independent news organization focused on inequality and innovation in education. Sign up for Hechinger’s newsletter.
Opinion: How D.C. school reform drove student achievement

Opinion by the Editorial Board
September 12, 2021 5:43 p.m. EDT

One of the success stories in American education has been the turnaround of education in the nation’s capital in the decade since school reform was ushered in. Schools in D.C., once ranked among the worst in the country, are now some of the fastest improving. Critics of the changes that included mayoral control of the school system long have argued that statistics purporting to show academic gains actually reflect gentrification and changes in the composition of the student body, not real improvements in the quality of education. A rigorous new study refutes that myth and demonstrates that D.C.’s bold school reform drove the progress in student achievement.

Evidence of D.C.’s improvement isn’t new, as students have posted outsize gains on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) during the past decade.

A report this year by the Council of the Great City Schools spotlighted D.C. as the fastest-improving of all large urban school districts, outperforming expectations. Now researchers from Mathematica, a social policy research company, have confirmed that students in both D.C.’s school system and the public charter schools made impressive academic progress compared with other cities in the 15 years since mayoral control was implemented. What’s significant about Mathematica’s study is that it used new advanced statistical modeling techniques to make a causal connection between the progress of D.C.’s students and the city’s policy decisions, debunking population shifts as a factor. D.C. did see an influx of more White and higher-income students; the share of Black students fell 15 percentage points and the share of White students rose by the same amount. But researchers found that improvements in learning were over and above what could be attributed to demographic changes in student enrollment. In fact, researchers found that Black and Hispanic students showed the most real progress in math and early literacy. Researchers also concluded that the positive impacts last at least through eighth grade for math, suggesting that, unlike many other types of reform, the benefits in D.C. did not fade out.

There is, of course, still much work to be done. Most students are still not proficient in reading and math, and the impacts of covid-19 have been devastating, putting students even further behind. D.C. has, as Mathematica researchers noted, a strong educational system with mayoral control, an independent charter authorizer and a unified enrollment process. It must continue to build on that foundation.
CMS Leaders Will Work Toward A Better Plan For Building Academic Skills After Setbacks

WFAE | By Ann Doss Helms
Published September 28, 2021 at 5:46 AM EDT

Crafting a more effective plan for student success is the top item on Tuesday's Charlotte-Mecklenburg school board agenda.

Superintendent Earnest Winston and his staff will report on goals and strategies for reading and language arts, where students saw major setbacks during the pandemic. The report attached to the agenda shows the district is now dramatically off track for the six-year goals it hoped to meet in 2024.

The plan was launched under then-Superintendent Clayton Wilcox in 2018. It calls for 52.5% of all CMS third-graders to have 2021 reading scores that put them on track for college and career success, moving toward 80% in three more years. In reality, just over 29% of last year's third-graders hit that mark.

For Black and Hispanic students, the 2021 goals for third-grade reading were 40.8% and 38.2% respectively, with the aim of steadily progressing to above 75% by 2024. The actual college-career ready percentages for those groups were 17.8% and 13.8%.

Even before the results came in for a year disrupted by the pandemic, CMS came under fire from county commissioners and some community leaders for shortchanging Black and Hispanic students and the low-performing schools that serve thousands of them.

Commissioners failed in their effort to withhold $56 million from the district until CMS leaders produced a better academic plan. But CMS officials said they were already working to improve the six-year strategic plan.

Tuesday night’s discussion is part of the quest to do that — and to improve the school board’s focus on student performance.

We can’t afford to flounder right now," board Chair Elyse Dashew said Monday. "We can’t afford to be fuzzy right now."
After staff presents the update on reading results, which is part of the ongoing monitoring process, consultant A.J. Crabill from the Council of the Great City Schools will guide the board in asking questions that keep the spotlight on results.

Dashew said that's things like, "What’s working and what isn’t working? If something’s working, what do we need to replicate? If something isn’t working, what are we going to do about it? What are we going to do differently? How much is that going to cost?"

Dashew says the goal is to have the strategic plan updated — with adjustments for the pandemic as needed — by December.
SURVEY ON PUBLIC RELATIONS OPERATIONS
### Survey on Public Relations Operations

In an effort to determine the structure and function of Public Relations office in our member districts, the Council is distributing a survey requesting information on these offices.

**Name of School District:**

**District Enrollment:**

**Name of Department**

**Brief Description of the Department:**

**Number of Staff Positions:**

**Title of Positions: (please use comma after each position)**

Please indicate the duties your department handles:
- [ ] Press Secretary/Media Relations
- [ ] Marketing/PR/Promotions
- [ ] Print & Online Publications
- [ ] Internal Communications
- [ ] Event Planning
- [ ] Alumni/Parent & Community Engagement
- [ ] Partnerships & Volunteers
- [ ] Social Media/Website
- [ ] Television Operations
- [ ] Public Records
- [ ] Other, please specify

**Operational Budget (Include Salaries)** **If not able to include salaries, please indicate that:**

If you use any outside consultants (i.e. graphic design, web maintenance, etc) please list them and how much you spend on these services

Are social media responsibilities handled by one person or multiple people? If one person, list his or her title?

Click the social media tools your district uses:
- [ ] Facebook
- [ ] Twitter
- [ ] Youtube
- [ ] Google+
- [ ] Pinterest
- [ ] Tumblr
- [ ] Instagram
- [ ] LinkedIn
- [ ] Other, please specify

Please list the number of followers for each social media tool:

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Submit  Cancel
BERNARD HARRIS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM
The Council of the Great City Schools and The Harris Institute are awarding four scholarships, with a value of $5,000 each, to two African American and two Hispanic students currently completing their senior year of high school in a member district of the Council of the Great City Schools. Applicants must be accepted for full-time enrollment at a four-year college or university in the next academic year, and pursuing a degree in Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics (STEM).

**The deadline to apply is April 9, 2021.**

Apply Online at: [https://www.cgcs.org/Scholarships](https://www.cgcs.org/Scholarships)
2021
CGCS-Bernard Harris Math and Science Scholarship Program

Application Guidelines
Scholarships awarded in May 2021

For questions, please visit: https://www.cgcs.org/Scholarships
or email tharris@cgcs.org

Deadline to apply is April 9, 2021
CGCS-Bernard Harris Math and Science Scholarships  
2021 Application Guidelines

The Council of the Great City Schools and Dr. Bernard Harris strongly believe that education is key to progress, development and economic growth in our country. Together, they have developed a partnership to increase awareness about the need for more math and science graduates, especially among underrepresented populations. This scholarship is part of their efforts to support students of color who plan to pursue math- and science-related degrees.

Four scholarships for two boys and two girls, with a value of $5,000 each, will be awarded in May 2021 to two Black and two Hispanic students currently completing their senior year of high school in a member district of the Council of the Great City Schools (see list of member districts on left). Applicants must be accepted for full-time enrollment at a four-year college or university in the next academic year and pursuing a degree in Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics (STEM).

The scholarships, named in recognition of Dr. Bernard A. Harris, Jr., serve underrepresented students pursuing careers in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. As a former astronaut, physician and businessman, Dr. Harris is an outstanding role model dedicated to serving as a mentor to the scholarship recipients.

Applications will be reviewed by a committee appointed by the Council of the Great City Schools. Recipients will be selected by Dr. Harris and notified in May. The scholarship will be paid to the university of the recipient’s choice and can be applied to tuition and related expenses during the 2021-2022 academic school year.

To apply for the 2021 scholarship, this application must be submitted online by April 9, 2021. Click here to apply or go to: https://tinyurl.com/ycd6z8dr.

Applications should include evidence of the applicant’s academic achievement in high school, leadership skills or community service in the area of Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics and the applicant’s commitment to pursue a career in a STEM field. To be eligible for the scholarship, the applicant must have a minimum 3.0 unweighted grade point average and have been accepted as a full-time student at a four-year institution of higher education.

No person may receive more than one award administered by the Council of the Great City Schools in the same academic year. Employees or immediate family members of The Harris Foundation or the Council of the Great City Schools are not eligible to apply for these scholarships.

*All applicants must attend a public school in a Council of the Great City Schools district. Go to: www.cgcs.org/domain/57 to find the list of CGCS districts. (Students in Toronto are not eligible).
The Harris Institute is a 501 (c) (3), non-profit organization founded by former NASA Astronaut Dr. Bernard A. Harris, Jr., to serve socially and economically disadvantaged communities locally and across the nation striving to reach the most underserved populations in the areas of **Education**, **Health**, and **Wealth**. The institute supports programs that empower individuals, in particular minorities and economically and/ or socially disadvantaged, to recognize their potential and pursue their dreams. The education mission of The Harris Institute is to enable youth to develop and achieve their full potential through the support of social, recreational and educational programs. The Harris Institute believes students can be prepared now for the careers of the future through a structured education program and the use of positive role models. More than 50,000 students have participated and benefited from THI programs. 

[www.theharrisinstitute.org](http://www.theharrisinstitute.org)

The Council of the Great City Schools is the only national organization exclusively representing the needs of urban public schools, and is based in Washington, D.C. Composed of 76 large city districts, its mission is to promote the cause of urban schools and to advocate for the inner-city students through legislation, research and media relations. The organization also provides a network for school districts sharing common problems to exchange information, and to collectively address new challenges as they emerge in order to deliver the best possible education for urban youth. [www.cgcs.org](http://www.cgcs.org)

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**CGCS-Bernard Harris Math and Science Scholarship Recipients**

*This scholarship means a great deal to me and it significantly helps my family and me towards my college expenses.*

Eliska Peacock is a graduate of the District of Columbia Public Schools and received a CGCS-Bernard Harris Math and Science Scholarship in 2020. She is studying computer science at Stanford University in California.

*This scholarship helped me tremendously and I am very grateful to have received it.*

Ruben Marroquin is a graduate of the Houston Independent School District and received a CGCS-Bernard Harris Math and Science Scholarship in 2019. He is studying electrical and computer engineering at Rice University in Texas.
Bernard Harris selected the winners of the scholarship. They are:

Hispanic male:
Saul Balcarel- Miami-Dade County Public Schools

Hispanic female-
Natalie Martinez- Santa Ana Unified School District

African American female:
Destiny Caldwell- East Baton Rouge Parish

African American male:
Emini Offutt- Nashville Public Schools
Demographic Overview:

Total Candidates from Council Districts: 417
Number of Districts Represented: 59

Number of Black Male Applicants: 87
Number of Black Female Applicants: 134
Number of Hispanic Male Applicants: 82
Number of Hispanic Female Applicants: 114

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<th>Black Male</th>
<th>Hispanic Female</th>
<th>Hispanic Male</th>
<th>District Total</th>
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SOCIAL MEDIA
COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS HIGHLIGHTS: Monthly Update: June 2021

KEY MESSAGES

» Critical Race Theory Statement
» Mirrors or Windows Report
» 2021 CGCS-Bernard Harris Scholarship Winners
» Vaccination Efforts

MOST POPULAR SOCIAL MEDIA POST:

New Study Shows Students in Big City Schools Are Mitigating The Effects of Poverty Faster than Others https://cgcs.org/Page/1288

MIRRORS OR WINDOWS

How Well Do Large City Public Schools Overcome the Effects of Poverty and Other Barriers?
June 2021

SOCIAL MEDIA STATS

» 54.6K Impressions
» 7,497 Profile Visits
» 107 Mentions
» 4 Link Clicks per day
» 27 Retweets
» 66 Likes
» 29 New Followers

ANALYSIS:

This month, our Mirrors and Windows report, as well as our statement on critical racial theory, did well. Students in Miami-Dade Public Schools, East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Santa Ana Unified School District, and Metro Nashville Schools were the winners of the 2021 CGCS-Bernard Harris Scholarships. The vaccination efforts in 51 member school districts were also recognized in June.
COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS HIGHLIGHTS: Monthly Update: June 2021

BROADCAST AND PRINT MEDIA

1 Press Release

» Statement on Critical Race Theory

3 Media Mentions

» Wall Street Journal- Can Schools Mandate Covid-19 Vaccines for Children? What We Know

» WFAE 90.7- Charlotte Mayor Lyles Won’t Take A Side In CMS-County Funding Battle

» USA Today- Will schools and day cares require masks or COVID-19 vaccines in fall 2021?

URBAN EDUCATOR TOP HEADLINES

» Celebrating Outstanding 2021 Urban School Graduates

» Study Shows Urban Students Mitigating the Effects of Poverty

» New Blueprint to Help Urban School Districts Spend COVID-19 Relief Funds

» New Leaders in Houston, Denver and Toronto

» Nation’s Big-City Public Schools Ramp Up Efforts to Vaccinate Students

» New Leadership at Council Begins

» Dallas Urban Educator of the Year Awards $10,000 Green-Garner Scholarship

» Legislative Column: Finding a Legislative Path Forward

TOP DIGITAL MEDIA POSTS

» New Study Shows Students in Big City Schools Are Mitigating The Effects of Poverty Faster than Others
https://www.cgcs.org/Page/1288

» Read the Council’s Executive Director Statement on Critical Race Theory at:
https://tinyurl.com/4rwh32bn

» Students in @MDCPS, @ebrpschools, @SantaAnaUSD, @MetroSchools are 2021 Math & Science Scholars
https://bit.ly/3jv3xXw

» Read the vaccination efforts being undertaken in 51 Council-member school districts at: https://tinyurl.com/384yyu8d

» This framework offers guidance, resources, and recommendations to the nation’s largest city school systems on how to spend new Covid-19 federal relief funds strategically and effectively.
https://www.cgcs.org/Page/1283
Monthly Update: June 2021

HIGHLIGHTS

Read the Council’s Executive Director Statement on Critical Race Theory at: tinyurl.com/4rwh32bn

Council Director of Research Ray Harris and Deputy Secretary SecCardona met today.

This framework offers guidance, resources, and recommendations to the nation’s largest city school systems on how to spend new Covid-19 federal relief funds strategically and effectively. cgcs.org/P

Urban School Districts Ramping Up Efforts to Vaccinate Students.

Students in @MDCPS, @ebropschools, @SantaAnaUSD, @MetroSchools are 2021 Math & Science Scholars.

Congratulations! 2021 CGCS-Bernard Harris Math and Science Scholarship Recipients.
COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS HIGHLIGHTS:  
Monthly Update: July 2021

KEY MESSAGES
» Annual Report
» 2021 Great City Graduates
» New Council Chair

MOST POPULAR SOCIAL MEDIA POST:
@OCPSnews Superintendent to Lead Council of the Great City Schools  
https://tinyurl.com/hhy4r548

SOCIAL MEDIA STATS
» 63.5K Impressions
» 7,979 Profile Visits
» 191 Mentions
» 8 Link Clicks per day
» 75 Retweets
» 185 Likes
» 42 New Followers

ANALYSIS:
In July, we announced Orange County Superintendent Barbara Jenkins will lead the Council. We also highlighted 2021 graduates in our member districts and released our 2020-2021 Annual Report.
COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS HIGHLIGHTS: Monthly Update: July 2021

BROADCAST AND PRINT MEDIA

10 Media Mentions

» Chalkbeat Colorado- Aurora school board grants itself greater say in issues of school closures, layoffs, and more

» Las Vegas Sun- Setting the record straight on critical race theory in education

» Education Week- The Fastest-Improving City School Districts Aren’t the Ones You Might Expect

» Florida Times-Union- Beating the odds: New report on large city schools highlights Duval Schools’ work to close opportunity gap

» Government Technology- School’s Out! But Cyber Criminals Are Here to Stay

» KQED- How to Help Students Succeed in Algebra 1 This Year

» Doral Family Journal- M-DCPS Lauded for Making Progress in Mitigating the Effects of Poverty

» The Tennessean- Urban school districts have uphill battle in getting students back on track | Opinion

» Wall Street Journal- Schools Push to Get Students Vaccinated Before the Start of Academic Year

» West Orange Times & Observer- Jenkins named chair of Council of Great City Schools board

TOP DIGITAL MEDIA POSTS

» @OCPSnews Superintendent to Lead Council of the Great City Schools https://tinyurl.com/hhy4r548

» Congratulations to Agustin from @ABQschools for earning a full scholarship to @Harvard after moving from Ecuador. Congratulations as well to all #ClassOf2021 #ELls and @GreatCitySchls graduates! #GreatCityGrads https://bit.ly/3htSCe3

» We are proud to present our 2020-2021 #AnnualReport, highlighting our activities and accomplishments during the past year. https://bit.ly/3i4XTsL

» The latest Urban Educator news for you! -Congratulations to the Class of 2021! -Bond for @TulsaSchools Passes -New Leaders in @HoustonISD, @DPSNewsNow, @tdsb Check out these stories and more! https://conta.cc/3yVkOgP
The latest Urban Educator news for you!
- Congratulations to the Class of 2021!
- Bond for @TulsaSchools Passes
- New Leaders in @HoustonISD, @DPS @tsdb

Check out these stories and more! con!

We are proud to present our 2020-2021 #AnnualReport, highlighting our activities and accomplishments during the past year. bit.ly/3i4XTsL

Congratulations to the dozens of @sdschools first-gen #GreatCityGrads who received full scholarships to top colleges, as well as to all #FirstGen #ClassOf2021 ~... atCitySchls students! bit.ly/3AiIdDM

Congratulations to Agustin from @ABQschools for earning a full scholarship to @Harvard after moving from Ecuador. Congratulations as well to all #ClassOf2021 #ELLS and @GreatCitySchls graduates! #GreatCityGrads bit.ly/3htSCe3
Monthly Update: August 2021

COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS HIGHLIGHTS:

KEY MESSAGES

» Back to School
» Fall Conference
» Reopening Schools Tracker

MOST POPULAR SOCIAL MEDIA POST:

The Council is cosponsoring a webinar showcasing how schools can be critical partners in the effort to vaccinate students against COVID-19. http://events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/event?llr=4fyj4myab&oeidk=a07eiebfsgq4687c267

SOCIAL MEDIA STATS

» 23.3K Impressions
» 3,738 Profile Visits
» 149 Mentions
» 2 Link Clicks per day
» 10 Retweets
» 39 Likes
» 16 New Followers

ANALYSIS:

Schools are in session! This month, the nation’s big-city schools met with Department of Education Secretary Miguel Cardona. We also announced the opening of registration for our 65th Annual Fall Conference and submissions for the Green-Garner award.
COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS HIGHLIGHTS:
Monthly Update: August 2021

BROADCAST AND PRINT MEDIA

1 Press Release

» Nation’s Big-City Schools Meet with Education Secretary to Discuss the Reopening of Schools

7 Media Mentions

» New York Times - As Childhood Covid Cases Spike, School Vaccination Clinics Are Slow Going

» New York Times - Parents support school mask mandates more than required vaccines, a study finds

» The Atlanta Journal-Constitution - Atlanta school district to host academy for potential board candidates

» The Boca Raton Tribune - New Palm Beach County Schools Superintendent sworn in

BROADCAST AND PRINT MEDIA (CONT’D)

» USA Today - Schools and day cares mandate COVID vaccines or masks for fall 2021 back to school?

» WCSC - Charleston Co. School District outlines more COVID-19 protocol changes as students return to class

» WUSF Public Media - Alachua, Broward Found In Violation Of School Mask Rules, Face Penalties

TOP DIGITAL MEDIA POSTS

» The Council is cosponsoring a webinar showcasing how schools can be critical partners in the effort to vaccinate students against COVID-19. http://events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/

» One school board member will be selected as this year’s top urban educator. The winner will receive a $10,000 college scholarship to be given to any student in his or her school district. Apply at: https://cgcs.org/domain/19

» #PressRelease Nation’s Big-City Schools Meet with Education Secretary to Discuss the Reopening of Schools https://bit.ly/3yLrZsk

» Find out how the nation’s Great City School districts are handling vaccine and mask mandates, along with coronavirus testing with our reopening school tracker at: https://bit.ly/38tduhA
COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS HIGHLIGHTS:
Monthly Update: August 2021

HIGHLIGHTS

Find out how the nation’s Great City School districts are handling vaccine and mask mandates, along with coronavirus testing with our reopening school tracker at: bit.ly/38tduhA

Press Release Nation’s Big-City Schools Meet with Education Secretary to Discuss the Reopening of Schools bit.ly/3yLrZsk

Welcome back students and teachers! We are wishing you a happy and healthy 2021-2022 school year. Education brings about opportunity, and in turn inspiration. #backtoschool

Registration is open for the Council’s Fall Conference, Oct. 20-24, hosted by @PHLschools #CGCS21 cgcs.org/domain/20

One school board member will be selected as this year’s top urban educator. The winner will receive a $10,000 college scholarship to be given to any student in his or her school district. Apply at: cgcs.org/domain/19
THE URBAN EDUCATOR
Urban school students have endured a challenging year dealing with a global pandemic but they have demonstrated resilience and perseverance time and again. The students featured here - recent graduates in the Class of 2021 - have overcome seemingly insurmountable odds and have reached the stratosphere of academic excellence.
Mitigating the Effects of Poverty

Students in the nation’s urban schools are about 50 percent more likely to be poor, twice as likely to be English learners, twice as likely to be Black or Hispanic, and about 50 percent more likely to have a parent who did not finish high school as students in all other schools.

New Blueprint to Help Urban School Districts Spend COVID-19 Relief Funds

With the recent passage of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act, the 77 member school districts that represent the Council of the Great City Schools are expected to receive more than $40 billion in supplemental funding, as part of the $122.8 billion funds provided under the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund.

New Leaders in Houston, Denver and Toronto

The Houston, Denver and Toronto school systems have new superintendents, while other districts have begun searches to fill vacancies at the top.

Nation’s Big-City Public Schools Ramp Up Efforts to Vaccinate Students

When the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine was authorized for children ages 16 and older in December and then approved for use in 12-to-15-year-olds last month, urban school districts around the nation began taking a number of proactive measures to vaccinate students and contain the spread of the virus.
New Leadership at Council Begins

The Council of the Great City Schools will head into the 2021-2022 school year under new leadership.

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Dallas Urban Educator of the Year Awards $10,000 Green-Garner Scholarship

Kamila Vargas, a 2021 graduate of Thomas Jefferson High School in Dallas, has been awarded the $10,000 Green-Garner Scholarship, based on her high academic performance and strong character.

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Legislative Column

Finding a Legislative Path Forward

After the swift enactment of the American Rescue Plan in early March, the Biden administration proposed a series of legislative priorities including the American Jobs Plan for national infrastructure, the American Families Plan for human infrastructure, and an annual federal budget that accelerates investments in meeting critical domestic needs.

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Read more stories here

Four Urban Students Win CGCS-Bernard Harris Scholarships in Math and Science | Council Names New Research Director | Bond for Tulsa Public Schools Passes | First Alaskan and Indigenous Student to Receive Princeton Prize in Race Relations | Buffalo Public Schools Receives 1619 Project-Pulitzer Education Center Grant | Los Angeles Partners with Music
Upcoming Events

65th Annual Fall Conference

The Council of the Great City Schools is holding its 65th Annual Fall Conference in Philadelphia.

When:
October 20 - October 24, 2021

Where:
Sheraton Philadelphia Downtown
201 N 17th St.
Philadelphia, PA 19103

Register

Executive Director
Ray Hart

Editor
Tonya Harris
tharris@cgcs.org

Staff Writer
Joanne Coley
jcoley@cgcs.org

Chair
Barbara Jenkins
Superintendent, Orange County (Orlando)

Chair-elect
Kelly Gonez
Board Member, Los Angeles

Secretary-Treasurer
William Hite
Superintendent, Philadelphia

A newsletter published by the Council of the Great City Schools, representing 75 of the nation’s largest urban public school districts. Click here to learn more. All news items should be submitted to Tonya Harris (tharris@cgcs.org).
Urban Schools Welcome Students Back to Full-Time In-Person Learning This Fall

The nation’s urban schools began the 2021-2022 school year with students returning to in-person learning and with extensive health and safety measures put in place to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Read More

Who’s Driving the Bus? Urban Districts Work to Combat Bus Driver Shortage

Mark Bedell has worn many hats over the course of his career – teacher, assistant principal, principal, school improvement
Chicago Names New CEO, Tenure Extended for Guilford Superintendent

San Antonio school chief Pedro Martinez is returning to Chicago – his hometown – as chief executive officer.

Historian Henry Louis Gates to Speak at Council Virtual Fall Conference

Historian, filmmaker, PBS host and Harvard scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr. will be the keynote speaker at the Council of the Great City Schools’ Virtual 65th Annual Fall Conference, which takes place October 19-23.

Nominations Sought for 2021 Urban Educator of the Year

In the continued efforts of the Council of the Great City Schools to highlight and elevate urban educators, the Council is now seeking nominations for the 32nd Annual Green-Garner Award.
Back-to-School Message from the Chair of the Council, Barbara Jenkins

It is hard to believe that we are celebrating the start of another school year! As this year’s chair of the board, I am honored to address the school boards and superintendents of our GREAT CITY SCHOOLS.

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Council Tracker Provides Info on Masks, Vaccines & Testing

The 2021-2022 school year is poised to be as challenging as the previous year for urban school leaders who must make high-stakes decisions about student and employee health and safety as the COVID-19 pandemic continues.

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Legislative Column

New Federal Stimulus Funding at a Critical Juncture

With the beginning of the new school year and the spike in COVID-19 delta infections, a hopeful return to normal remains elusive.

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Read more stories here

Council Releases Report on School-Located COVID-19 Vaccination Events | Cleveland Presents Diploma in Remembrance of Tamir Rice | Des Moines World Language Program Earns National Recognition

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