

COMMUNICATIONS

STATEMENTS



Statement on the Events of January 6, 2021: A New Day of Infamy

on

Behalf of the Nation's Urban Public School Leaders

By the

Council of the Great City Schools

School leaders, teachers, and educators from the nation's urban public schools condemn the actions of the violent rioters who stormed and desecrated the Capitol at the encouragement of our president and his enablers. Make no mistake—this was not only an attack on the Capitol building, but on democracy itself. Citizens of the world are watching this display of lawlessness with shock and horror as the world's beacon of civility—the shining “city upon a hill”—is reduced to a crime scene. Public school educators everywhere teach our children to respect our leaders, our institutions, and the process by which we as a nation choose our representatives, and we weep now at the loss of innocence and trust these events have wrought. Defiling our capitol and disrupting the work of the people's House and Senate in an effort to overturn a free and fair election is a betrayal of our founding principles. Unfortunately, we are in this position because our president has lied repeatedly to the American public about who won this election and has promoted the treasonous notion that people should take matters into their own hands in attempting what is nothing short of insurrection.

As we struggle to help our children understand how this happened and what it means, we should be clear about our collective outrage and our commitment to restoring peace and democracy in the months and years to come. Our students have lost so much over the past year, and now they must reconcile what they have been taught about the ideals of our democratic nation with the criminal attacks they are witnessing unfold in our capitol. The process of rebuilding and healing our country is now the great challenge of our lifetimes, and the nation's public-school educators welcome our responsibility and charge to work toward a brighter future on behalf of our students and our country.

PRESS RELEASES

NEWS...NEWS... NEWS...NEWS



Council of the Great City Schools

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cgcs.org

MEDIA ADVISORY

October 8, 2020

CONTACT: Tonya Harris at: tharris@cgcs.org

Laura Bush, Julián Castro and Ibram X. Kendi To Address City Educators

Pulitzer-Prize Columnist Thomas Friedman to Join Panel Discussion

WASHINGTON, Oct. 8 – Former first lady Laura Bush, former Democratic presidential candidate Julián Castro and historian Ibram X. Kendi, author of the best-selling book *How to Be an Antiracist*, will address urban educators at the Council of the Great City Schools’ virtual 64th Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 13-17.

Also addressing the nation’s urban school leaders will be Pulitzer-Prize *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, who will participate in a session on “The Future of Education,” alongside four big-city superintendents from Baltimore, Boston, Cleveland and Tulsa.

A national town hall meeting will be held on Oct. 16 featuring high school student leaders from Boston, Philadelphia, Fresno, Long Beach, Omaha, Charlotte, Palm Beach, Cincinnati, Jackson, Miss., and Portland, Ore., to discuss issues of race and equity. The 75-minute town hall will be moderated by Denver school board member and social justice activist Tay Anderson.

On Oct. 15, the “**Urban Superintendent of the Year**” will be announced in a live ceremony. Twenty superintendents are finalists for the Green-Garner Award, the nation’s top award in urban-education leadership.

Under the banner “Championing Urban Education,” the four-day virtual conference will feature some 100 presentations devoted to COVID-19-related schoolwork as well as issues of equity and race. Access <https://tinyurl.com/y4ycobd7> for the agenda.

#

The *Twitter* hashtag for the conference is #CGCS20

NEWS...NEWS...NEWS...NEWS



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MEDIA ADVISORY

October 9, 2020

CONTACT: Tonya Harris at: tharris@cgcs.org

Students to Speak Out on Race and Equity at National Town Hall Meeting

WASHINGTON, Oct. 9 – Following the rise of protests that occurred in cities across the nation this summer after the killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis, a panel of urban students will discuss issues of race and equity at a national town hall meeting on Oct. 16.

The 75-minute forum will be held by the Council of the Great City Schools in conjunction with the urban-school coalition's virtual 64th Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 13-17.

The town hall meeting will feature student leaders from 10 urban school districts and will be moderated by Denver school board member and social justice activist Tay Anderson.

WHO: **Tay Anderson**, school board member of Denver Public Schools, *Moderator*
Alexa Butler of Fresno, a race and social justice advocate
Jemma Currie of Palm Beach, Fla., an environmental protection advocate
Keylisha Diaz of Philadelphia, a member of the city's school board
Khymani James of Boston, a member of the Boston Student Advisory Council
Tyra Patterson of Jackson, Miss., member of the Mississippi Student Advisory Council
Glenn Perez Rodriguez of Long Beach, youth leader with Californians for Justice
Gabriel Schuhl of Charlotte, student advisor to the city's school board
Simone' Denise Simmons of Cincinnati, student ambassador
Carmella Thomas of Portland, Ore., a racial equity leader
Paw Thlay Wah of Omaha, representative for the district's student panel

WHAT: **National Town Hall Meeting:**
Students Speak Out on Race and Equity at National Town Hall Meeting

WHEN: Friday, Oct. 16 (3 – 4:15 p.m., Eastern Time)

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The *Twitter* hashtag for the town hall meeting is **#StudentsSpeak2020**

NEWS... NEWS... NEWS... NEWS



Council of the Great City Schools

1331 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W., Suite 1100N, Washington, D.C. 20004

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EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE

October 15, 2020 (4:30 p.m., EST)

CONTACT: Tonya Harris

or tharris@cgcs.org

Dallas Superintendent Named Top Urban Educator

WASHINGTON, Oct. 15 – Dallas Independent School District Superintendent Michael Hinojosa received recognition as the 2020 Urban Educator of the Year at the Council of the Great City Schools’ virtual 64th Annual Fall Conference.

Twenty superintendents from big-city school districts competed for the nation’s highest honor in urban education leadership, recognizing in alternating years an outstanding superintendent and school board member from 76 of the largest urban public-school systems in the nation.

Hinojosa was announced the winner of the prestigious Green-Garner Award at the Council’s 31st Annual “Urban Educator of the Year” virtual award ceremony.

Sponsored by the Washington, D.C.- based Council, Cenergistic, Curriculum Associates, and K-12 Insight, the top prize is presented each year in memory of Richard R. Green, the first African American chancellor of the New York City school system, and businessman Edward Garner, who served on the Denver school board.

A graduate of Dallas ISD, Hinojosa served six years at the helm of the nation’s 14th largest school system before leaving in 2011. He returned for a second term as superintendent in 2015 and helped persuade voters to approve a \$1.6 billion bond program, the district’s largest in history.

Under his leadership, the Dallas school system is making a steady rise in student achievement over the last three years. Hinojosa has also spearheaded an effort to increase internet access and connectivity, taking the lead in forming the “Operation Connectivity Task Force,” bringing together North Texas K-12 technology officers, the Texas Urban Council of big-city superintendents and the Council to permanently solve the issue of connectivity at the state and national levels. He has also worked to increase the number of people of color and women in the district’s leadership rank.

“Michael Hinojosa has been a true champion for urban education and his passion for equity and excellence has had a profound effect on how all of us advocate for our urban students,” says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. “Over his 41-year career his dedication and humility has made a difference in the lives of the students he serves and there could be no one more deserving of this award.”

As the recipient of the 2020 Green-Garner Award, Hinojosa receives a \$10,000 college scholarship to present to a student in the Dallas Independent School District.

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ARTICLES

**ARTICLES- CORONAVIRUS CHALLENGES AND
RESPONSE**

Austin American Statesman

Student enrollment in Austin area drops amid pandemic

By [Melissa B. Taboada](#)

Posted Oct 16, 2020 at 3:37 PM

Thousands of Austin-area students have opted out of public school this year, particularly those in prekindergarten and kindergarten, as parents grapple with how to best educate their children while keeping them safe amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The Austin school district has seen the biggest enrollment drop — 5,600 students, or 6.9% — since last school year, district data show. Neighboring fast-growth districts, Round Rock and Leander, have lost 2,660 and 1,105 respectively.

Austin-area districts aren't alone: School systems across the state and country are counting fewer students. Families have turned to hiring tutors to teach a small pod of children, private school or home schooling, while others are simply forgoing a formal education for children who otherwise would go to pre-K or kindergarten. In Texas, children aren't required to enroll in school until first grade.

The declines come at a cost to school districts, which already are facing greater coronavirus-related expenses, such as for personal protective equipment, student plexiglass barriers and more robust technology to support increased virtual learning. Every student who withdraws from public school in Texas costs school districts about \$9,000 in education funding. The enrollment decline could equate to a loss of \$50 million for the Austin district this school year.

In an attempt to reverse an already shrinking enrollment, Austin in recent years had expanded its prekindergarten program, offering classes to 3-year-olds and tuition-paid pre-K students. The Austin district is among the few that offer tuition-based pre-K for \$4,656 a school year for children who don't qualify for the state program, which provides early education to 3- and 4-year-olds who are in foster care, from low-income families, whose parents are in the military or whose primary language isn't English.

But this year, many parents have opted to keep these young learners out of school, both virtually and in person. There are 2,676 fewer students in prekindergarten and kindergarten this year in the Austin district — nearly half of the district's overall enrollment decline.

Megan Olshavsky's son, Jonah, is among the would-be kindergarteners. Before the pandemic hit, Olshavsky planned to send her 5-year-old son to kindergarten in an Austin

district school. But during the summer, when it was unclear whether campuses would reopen and whether Jonah would be able to interact with other children, Olshavsky decided to keep him at his private Montessori, which reopened in June.

She and her husband both work, and it would have been difficult to juggle virtual learning, the only option the Austin district offered during the initial weeks of the school year. Her son's preschool environment also is less restrictive than what's seen on Austin campuses — where children are required to wear masks and have plexiglass barriers at their desks. Even in the less restrictive environment, so far there have been no virus scares or outbreaks, she said. The children are kept in the same pod of eight or 10 and spend a lot of time outside where they have normal interactions, Olshavsky said.

“We feel good about the decision,” she said. “He’s in a place with teachers he knows, where he can interact with other kids and be where he feels comfortable.”

‘Excited to be back’

At Overton Elementary in East Austin, masks are worn by every staff member and student, including the prekindergarten 3-year-olds. Students spread out their arms like airplanes to ensure proper distance from one another. Teachers remind the students they can't sit together and applaud them when they space out. Students frequently wash their hands, toys are disinfected, and touched books must go in a bin for three days before they are used again.

Prekindergarten teacher Amanda Bradley's class for 4-year-olds is down by a handful of students. She is teaching 10 in person and three others who are learning virtually, carrying her laptop with her across the room as she goes over letter and word recognition. Other prekindergarten classes at the school, including the bilingual pre-K classes that typically enroll about 20 students each, have a fraction of the students they normally do. Six students are in the classroom next door; three are enrolled virtually. “I'm really excited to be back,” said Bradley, a 24-year teaching veteran. “Kids this age are so hands on. Pre-K is best in person for socialization and the hands-on learning. The socialization, being with their friends, is what is so important for pre-K4” (pre-K for 4-year-olds).

Students in pre-K and kindergarten classes in the Austin district were among the first to return for in-person learning, beginning Oct. 5. By Nov. 2, any student who wishes to attend school in the classroom will be able to do so. But based on parent surveys, district officials expect fewer than half of students to return to classrooms this year.

Most area districts opened schoolhouse doors earlier than the Austin district.

Overton Principal Courtney Colvin says while the 448-student school has fewer students in the early grades, she anticipates more will return in January. Enrollment is down by 12%, or 62 children.

“It’s understandable because they just want to keep them home,” Colvin said. “I think parents will feel more comfortable when they see the other children already coming to school. It’s a comfort level from a health perspective.”

Financial hit

While enrollment is down about 3% to 5% in urban districts nationally, urban Texas districts have seen greater declines, with some districts dropping 7% to 9%, said **Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools**, a coalition of 76 of the country’s largest school systems.

Any enrollment decline could take a financial toll on school systems, and if numbers don’t rebound, school boards and administrators in Texas could be forced to cut staff positions or programs. About 85% of districts’ budgets go to personnel.

“Until there is a solution, people are going to hit a wall pretty soon,” said Michael Hinojosa, Dallas district superintendent and Texas Urban Council of Superintendents co-legislative chairman. “Districts that don’t have a lot of reserves will be in a lot of trouble financially.”

For this school year, some states have decided not to penalize school districts for enrollment drops, placing a “hold harmless” provision to fully fund the districts based on pre-coronavirus enrollment projections. The Texas Education Agency is waiting 12 weeks after a district’s first day of school before calculating funding based on attendance. That could provide some school districts full funding through much of the first semester. In the meantime, the state is funding the districts based on projected enrollments, which often anticipated growth.

“Given the uncertain nature of this public health crisis, we are giving as much support and flexibility as possible to school districts,” Texas’ Education Commissioner Mike Morath said.

But Hinojosa said it might not be enough and he hopes the state will continue the hold harmless provision, despite the lower enrollments.

“We’re trying to provide as much quality instruction as we can, and it’s already tough on teachers. They have to balance online and in person, then they’re worried about their

jobs. That's not going to be good for achievement long term," he said. "We're going to need additional resources, not less.

"The worry we have, especially for urban areas, is how significant this loss is going to be. It's going to be tough," he said.

Round Rock Superintendent Steve Flores said many parents who are opting for home schooling or choosing other options for their children who otherwise would attend pre-K and kindergarten have told him they still consider themselves part of the district. He said he's confident the children will enroll later.

"This is certainly a new phenomenon for a district like Round Rock, which has been growing at a rapid pace for so many years," Flores said. "No one could've predicted this scenario, and it certainly will have budget implications for our district and districts around the state and nation dealing with the same issue."

Flores said the extension of the hold harmless provision by the education agency is needed because the district needs to keep all its teachers now for online and on-campus instruction and for when students return.

"A disruption in staffing, only to hire back when students return, is not good for anyone," he said. "We'll be aggressive to earn our students back."

Long-term effects

The loss of students in the early grades also could have long-term academic consequences. Prekindergarten and kindergarten are crucial periods for learning not only letters, shapes and numbers, but language and vocabulary development, social learning, emotional self-regulation and how to get along with others. Early education experts warn that students who are not receiving quality instruction likely will struggle for years to come.

"The number of kids who can benefit from preschool has gone up, and the number who are benefiting has gone down. It's a huge lost opportunity," said Steven Barnett, the senior co-director of the National Institute for Early Education Research.

While virtual learning helps, "parents have not been able to fill in the gap," Barnett said. In addition to job losses and parents trying to work from home while instructing their little ones, many homes have fewer resources, such as a rich library of books, technology and other learning tools, like Legos, he said.

“We will have a cohort of kids, and depending on how long this goes on, maybe more than one, who are less successful because we have not provided them with the foundation they otherwise would have had for success,” he said.

NPR—WBEZ (Chicago)

Chicago Public Schools Enrollment Plummetts

Like many school districts around the country, CPS sees a huge dropoff, losing nearly 15,000 students in a year defined by the pandemic.

By [Sarah Karp](#)

Oct. 16, 7:12 a.m. CT

Amid a pandemic and all remote learning, Chicago Public Schools saw its biggest decline in student enrollment in two decades.

Enrollment is down by about 4% or about 14,500 fewer students this year compared to last year, according to school district figures released Friday.

This accelerates a downward trend over the last nine years. Just a decade ago, the school system had nearly 403,000 students. This year, the official enrollment count is at 340,658.

But Chicago's enrollment loss is not unique. This year, most big city school districts have seen enrollment drops of between 3% and 5%, said [Michael Casserly](#), executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools.

In Chicago and many other school districts across the nation, much of the drop is due to preschoolers and kindergarteners deciding not to enroll. Fifty-seven percent of the drop in enrollment compared to last year is among these young students, according to CPS. Forty-one percent of the enrollment drop is in pre-K alone.

The enrollment announcement comes as the news surfaces that the school district plans to [resume in-person learning](#) in November for preschool students and some students with disabilities. A final decision will be made closer to Nov. 9, the start of the second quarter, CPS said. The plan is for all other students to continue remote learning, with the possibility of additional grades resuming in-person learning as early as January.

Chief Education Officer LaTanya McDade said she is deeply concerned about thousands of four- and five-year-old children sitting out of school for months.

“We need our pre-K and kindergarten students in school and learning and preparing,” McDade said. “These are the foundational years.”

Mayor Lori Lightfoot said earlier this week that among the factors she was considering when looking at reopening school for in-person learning is that many young children and students with disabilities are not showing up for school at all.

“We have got to make decisions that maximize the opportunities for everyone, but particularly those students who I think are most vulnerable and are having the most challenges in a remote learning environment,” Lightfoot said.

But officials said they are not worried about the drop in enrollment hurting the school district financially. Some federal funding is tied to the number of low-income students, but it represents only about 10% of the district’s overall budget.

State money isn’t expected to decline because only increases in state funding are tied to enrollment and attendance and there is no jump in state funding this year.

“All hands on deck” strategy

In a change from past years, high school enrollment is relatively stable, with some neighborhood high schools that have been spiraling downward seeing small upticks.

But still there are 19 high schools that have less than 250 students, including four with fewer than 100 students. These are not only expensive to maintain, but they also struggle to offer robust programming for students.

McDade said the school district is providing extra support to these schools.

She also said the school district is working with elementary schools that saw especially big drops in students. A quarter of the school district’s 477 elementary schools had enrollment declines of 10% or more.

There are five community areas experiencing a more than 10% drop in elementary school students. They include West Garfield Park on the West Side and McKinley Park on the Southwest Side.

To help these schools try to shore up enrollment and attendance, Chicago Public Schools adopted a strategy that they call “all hands on deck” in which Safe Passage workers are making calls and security guards are doing home visits to try to get students enrolled.

Casserly said he is seeing similar efforts across the country.

“We’re trying to figure out exactly what the situation is, and what it is we can do about it,” he said. “A number of big city school districts have put in place

outreach strategies to try to figure out where the kids are, and to bring them back if they aren't otherwise enrolled.”

Casserly said the biggest concern is that missing students will experience learning loss.

But others say the bigger issue is the pandemic itself.

“The pandemic is causing all kinds of ripple effects on everything, schooling being one of them,” said Amanda Moreno, an associate professor at Erikson Institute, an early childhood, a graduate school in childhood development.

She said schools need to realize that even those in remote learning will need extra support when they return to in-person school.

Sarah Karp covers education for WBEZ. Follow her on Twitter [@WBEZeducation](#) and [@skedreporter](#).

Washington Post

Back to school: Many large districts are opening doors again

By [Laura Meckler](#) and [Valerie Strauss](#)

Oct. 19, 2020 at 1:05 p.m. EDT

Large school districts across the country are reopening campuses to students, a slow-moving reversal driven by fear that students are falling behind and early evidence that schools have not become the [coronavirus](#) superspreaders as feared.

It's a major shift from the start of the year when almost every big system began fully online.

Trepidation about the pandemic persists. In many cities, coronavirus infection rates are rising, which could prompt school leaders to reverse plans. Some classrooms and even entire schools have opened and had to close again in response to outbreaks. In some cities, opposition from teachers unions has slowed efforts to open buildings.

But overall, the trend is now toward more in-person school.

Of the 50 largest school districts, 24 have resumed in-person classes for large groups of students, and 11 others plan to in the coming weeks, according to a Washington Post survey. An additional four have opened, or plan to open, for small groups of students who need extra attention.

Many are in Florida and Texas, where Republican governors are requiring in-person classes, but schools are also open in New York City, Greenville, S.C., and Alpine, Utah, the state's largest district. Returns are planned in Charlotte, Baltimore and Denver.

Just 11 of the largest 50 school districts are still fully remote, with no immediate plans to change that.

"I think everybody's quite worried about what the price is that we've paid for having the buildings closed," said [Michael Casserly, executive director of Great City Schools](#), a lobbying group for urban districts. He said the biggest drivers are concern over substantial "learning loss" and a sense that even though remote education is better than it was in the spring, it still is not working well enough.

Officials also worry because some students are simply not showing up to remote classes, with attendance figures down in many places.

Casserly said many educators worry that “we are going to dig ourselves a hole that is so deep that it takes us years and years to get out of.”

The trend is evident, too, in tracking by the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington at Bothell. In the beginning of September, 24 of 106 mostly urban districts were open for at least some in-person school. By the end of October, that will rise to 69 out of 106, assuming districts stick with their announced plans.

“Parents are very, very eager to get their kids back to school. Students are very eager to get back to school,” said Robin Lake, the center’s director.

Assessing infection rates

In many districts, including in suburban Washington and the District of Columbia, students are being phased back into school, often starting with the youngest because online learning is so difficult for them. That’s also the approach in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in North Carolina, which is using a hybrid system in which students are on campus on certain days and online on others.

Superintendent Earnest Winston said it’s the right move because children learn best in person, but he worries as he sees infection rates rising. For the first time since late July, the tally of newly reported coronavirus cases in the United States [surpassed 64,000](#) last week. In 44 states and the District of Columbia, caseloads were higher than they were one month ago.

“This virus is still so new, things are changing rapidly, and so one thing that keeps me up at night is seeing this resurgence across the country,” he said. “I’m concerned we could move backward before we continue to move forward.”

But he is comforted that so far there is little evidence of significant transmission in school buildings.

A [tracking project](#) run out of Brown University, which includes data through late September from more than 1,200 schools, finds fewer than 1 percent of students and staff have confirmed coronavirus infections.

In Texas, which ordered schools to open, the state Health Department [reported last week](#) nearly 2,000 students with confirmed cases. That was a tiny fraction — well under 1 percent — of the 2.1 million students attending school in person. Among school staff, too, just a fraction of a percent reported infections.

And in New York City, the school system reported conducting more than 16,000 tests last week, with 28 people testing positive for the coronavirus — 20 staff members and eight students. That’s just 0.17 percent of the total.

Data in other states are less clear because districts are not required to report cases. But overall, experts say, infection rates are lower than what is being seen in the larger community.

It's not entirely clear why, but experts say factors include mitigation strategies used by many schools, such as required masks and social distancing in the buildings, as well as children's lower infection rates overall.

'We are losing them'

The learning losses during remote school have yet to be tallied, but they are believed to be significant for children in low-income families, who were already, as a group, academically behind. Data from an online math program called Zearn show students in high-income Zip codes have made more progress than is typical since January, meaning they used the program more than they would have, while those in low-income areas decreased their use, according to [an analysis](#) by Opportunity Insights, a research and policy institute based at Harvard University. Before the pandemic, high- and low-income students progressed through the program at similar rates.

"We are losing them," said Atlanta Schools Superintendent Lisa Herring. "We have a responsibility to start to do as much as we can, as safely as possible to not completely lose them before the close of this semester."

Still, rising case counts persuaded the district to postpone the restart from later this month to January.

In Broward County, Fla., the schools have offered one of the most successful online education programs in the country, with years-long investment in online learning. But Superintendent Robert Runcie said in-person classes remain the gold standard. As in other districts in Florida, campuses in Broward are now open.

"There's nothing good about being in the situation where we couldn't open our schools," he said.

Some districts are starting small, with just a handful of students with special needs. In San Diego, elementary school teachers identified children struggling the most with online learning and invited them back into classrooms for lessons and special services, said Superintendent Cindy Marten. In-person classes for these students began last week.

"We like to say in our district, 'If you can't reach 'em, you can't teach 'em,' so let's bring them in," she said.

Marten said the district has taken precautions advised by a team at the University of California at San Diego, including keeping students six feet apart from each other, checking symptoms, erecting dividers in classrooms and setting up sanitation and hand-washing stations.

In some schools, too, she said, classrooms have been set up outside. “It is San Diego, after all,” she said.

There are no set dates for other students to return to school, she said, and there won’t be until the district sees how the limited program now underway goes. “It’s like we are crossing a fast-moving river and stepping on the first stone,” she said.

Open, then closed

In many parts of the country, schools have opened and then closed after coronavirus exposures.

New York City, the largest school district in the country, became the first big-city system to reopen, with most of the 1.1 million students choosing to attend in person. Then some schools were forced shut after cases spiked in ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities, where residents had ignored social distancing and other health protocols.

In Jefferson County, Ky., the school district has been planning to begin reopening this week, but coronavirus cases are rising in the community, so that date probably will be pushed back, a spokesman said. Boston has opened classrooms for high-need students but delayed a phased reopening for others after virus rates rose in the city.

Other large districts have no plans to reopen. That includes the country’s second largest, Los Angeles Unified School District, which is offering in-person tutoring for some students but not regular school, and the third largest, Chicago Public Schools, where there is no in-person learning.

In Chicago, efforts to open buildings have run into opposition from the Chicago Teachers Union, which argues it would not be safe. The union’s complaint went to a formal arbitration, which the union won. The district is appealing. Meantime, the union is suggesting it could strike if teachers are ordered back into classrooms.

In the District of Columbia, union pressures are also at work. The public schools [plan to allow small groups of elementary school students](#) back into classrooms next month, a total of about 7,000 students who are homeless, learning English as a second language, or have special education needs. Buildings also will be open to other students who will participate in remote school while being supervised by nonteaching staff.

The Washington Teachers Union had laid out a set of sweeping demands to return to in-person teaching, including hazard pay and an end to teacher evaluations. The teachers later dropped many of those demands, but they are insisting on some authority to help determine whether buildings have met a set of negotiated safety standards.

And in Baltimore County, Md., the school district plans to bring back students with physical and developmental special needs to four schools next month, but pressure from teachers may change that, said spokesman Brandon Oland.

“The teachers at those schools have been expressing their concerns, so I’m not sure what that’s going to mean for the plan,” he said. “What I’ve learned is the plan can change.”

New York Times

Parents Are Worried About Schools. Are the Candidates?

The pandemic has made education a top issue for many voters. But you wouldn't know that from the candidates' stump speeches.

By Abby Goodnough

Oct. 22, 2020, 3:02 a.m. ET

Communities large and small are battling over whether and how to reopen schools closed since March. Superintendents are warning of drastic budget cuts on the horizon, teachers' unions are calling for standardized tests to be canceled for a second straight year and millions of children are learning remotely, with little evaluation of the impact on their academic growth.

Yet for months now, the extraordinary challenges of schooling during the coronavirus pandemic have not been a dominant campaign theme for either President Trump or his opponent, former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr.

That is partly because states and local districts have a larger role than the federal government in funding and running schools. But with so many families deeply affected by the pandemic's upending of school routines and potentially lasting impact on childhood learning, the lack of thoughtful focus on the issue has frustrated parents and educators alike.

"It should really be a pivotal topic," said Kisha Hale, principal of the upper grades at Eagle Academy Public Charter School in Washington, which has been providing virtual instruction to its largely low-income students since March. "With Covid-19, there are so many other things taking the focus away from education. But if our future doctors, teachers and lawyers can't be properly prepared during this time and we're not talking about it, what is it that we are saying really matters?"

Several recent polls have suggested the issue is a leading concern for many voters. A Politico and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health [survey released last month](#) found that schools and education was the second most important issue for likely voters, after the economy and jobs. And a [poll conducted this month in Michigan](#) for The Detroit Free Press found that reopening schools and the economy was the top issue concerning voters, followed by the public health crisis posed by the coronavirus.

In his rallies, Mr. Trump reliably mentions that he will fight for school choice and protect charter schools, which is both a pitch to urban Black and Hispanic voters, many of whom split with the Democratic Party on those issues, and a rallying cry for

conservatives. And he has consistently called for schools to reopen, threatening at one point to withhold federal funds from those that resisted.

But Mr. Trump has said little to nothing about the role of federal funding in helping districts reopen safely. And instead of calling for clear, prescriptive recommendations on reopening, he has pushed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to emphasize the importance of reopening schools, despite the concerns of many C.D.C. scientists that the White House has minimized the risks.

Mr. Biden frequently touts proposals to [triple federal spending](#) on schools that serve large numbers of poor students and to [provide free preschool](#) to all 3- and 4-year-olds, while reproaching Mr. Trump for not reaching a deal with Congress to provide more emergency school funding. The CARES Act [provided an initial \\$13 billion](#) in April, but groups representing educators have [asked for many times that amount](#).

“President Trump still doesn’t have any real plan for how to open our schools safely, no real plan for how to help parents feel secure for their children,” Mr. Biden [said last month](#) about reopening schools.

But while Mr. Biden has presented ideas on how and when school districts should reopen, he has not addressed the divisions that exist within his own party about what conditions need to be in place before sending students and teachers back to classrooms.

Nor has either campaign put forth ideas on improving remote learning, or on how colleges should be handling the return to campuses — deeply relevant issues to huge slices of the electorate.

Jeanine Malec, whose three elementary-school-age children are learning remotely in Minneapolis, said she wished the candidates would acknowledge the particular challenge of remote schooling for special education students, including her daughter. “She isn’t gaining skills right now; in a lot of ways she’s losing ground,” Ms. Malec said. “How will special needs kids be helped back onto their feet in the aftermath of Covid?”

The subject of school reopening is also not a major theme of either candidate’s ad campaigns, and it got less than a minute of airtime at the first debate between Mr. Biden and Mr. Trump last month. Nor is it among the topics that Kristen Welker of NBC News plans to question them on at Thursday’s debate, though “Fighting Covid-19” is.

Education has loomed larger in some previous elections. In 2000, George W. Bush made it central to his campaign by pushing a standardized testing plan that became the bipartisan No Child Left Behind law of 2001. His father, George H.W. Bush, said during his 1988 campaign that he wanted to be “the education president,” while Barack Obama in 2008 spoke often of fixing “the broken promises” of No Child Left Behind.

But this year, the election is so much a referendum on Mr. Trump — and his handling of the pandemic — that there is less space than ever for other policy discussions. The one exception might be health care and coverage, which has dominated campaign

advertisements up and down both party's tickets and is perhaps even more top of mind for voters than schooling challenges.

Still, Frederick Hess, the director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative-leaning think tank, said both candidates could have more skillfully tapped the widespread angst among parents whose children are learning from home this fall.

"Parents trying to work while supervising second graders — who's standing up for them?" Mr. Hess said. "It seems like a political winner. But here we are two weeks before the election and we haven't heard that case made effectively."

He added: "A Republican president who had evinced some degree of restraint and maturity and thoughtfulness could be making those arguments very powerfully right now — but that obviously doesn't describe Trump."

Mr. Biden has a more difficult needle to thread. Some of his strongest support comes from teachers' unions, which generally have opposed efforts to reopen schools. And in the Democratic cities and swing-district suburbs where schools are more likely to remain closed, and where Mr. Biden's support is based, many parents also remain resistant to reopening as public health concerns persist and data on the safety of school reopenings is sparse.

"In my district, everybody has their Biden yard signs but it's about a 50-50 split as to who wants their kids back in school," said Sarah Reckhow, an associate professor of political science at Michigan State University who studies education politics. "It's a tricky calculus for him."

In July, Mr. Biden proposed a ["five-step road map"](#) for reopening schools, emphasizing deference to local decision-making and increased federal aid for schools. He called for "clear, consistent, effective" national guidelines to help reopening decisions but did not offer specifics, saying those decisions should be made by state and local officials in consultation with communities.

Daniel A. Domenech, executive director of the American Association of School Administrators, said many of the superintendents his group represented wanted very specific recommendations. An example, he said, would be a recommendation to reopen only if less than 5 percent of coronavirus tests performed in a community are positive over several weeks' time, a threshold many epidemiologists support.

"Instead, we have districts with a 20 percent positivity rate opening up," he said. "There's been no unifying guidance that says, 'This is what we're all going to do together.'"

Michael Casserly, the longtime executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, an organization representing about 70 large urban districts, was more resigned than indignant about the fact that school reopening issues were not a central focus of the

candidates. He estimated that about 40 percent of his member districts have at least partially reopened. Some, he said, would rather not have politicians weighing in as they sort through how to address problems from staffing to ventilation to remote instruction.

“Many at the local level are fed up with the mixed messages they are getting from the federal and state levels,” Mr. Casserly said. “We don’t necessarily need for this to be the subject of any more political debate; we’ve had more than enough of that.”

Las Vegas Review-Journal

Teachers, school employees' unions voice opposition to CCSD hybrid plan

By **Julie Wootton-Greener** Las Vegas Review-Journal

November 10, 2020 - 6:37 pm

Unions representing school employees are voicing opposition to the Clark County School District's proposal to bring employees back to work sites in December and students back to classrooms in January.

The school district, which has about 307,000 students and 40,000 employees, [released a 205-page transition plan](#) Monday night. The School Board meets at 5 p.m. Thursday for a possible vote on whether to reopen schools under a hybrid model.

If approved, students would attend in-person classes two days a week and via distance education three days a week. Families would have the option of continuing with full distance education.

But Clark County school employee unions are citing concerns with reopening when the county is seeing a rising COVID-19 testing positivity rate, saying the school district isn't prepared to do so safely.

Marie Neisess, president of the Clark County Education Association, said in a Tuesday statement: "CCEA's position has not changed. We do not support any reopening without a robust safety program in place with testing, contact tracing and proper PPE as well as choice for educators to continue working remotely.

The Trustees should not approve any plan that does not include those two key pieces.”

Meanwhile, the National Education Association of Southern Nevada released a statement Monday night that said it stands in “strong opposition” to reopening at this time. The association said the school district isn’t prepared to deal with “the consequences of COVID spread on our campuses.”

In its statement, President Vicki Kreidel said: “We must prioritize human lives and re-opening schools for face-to-face instruction during the current spike would be putting other interests above the lives of our educators.”

And the Education Support Employees Association said in a Tuesday statement that the timeline for reopening schools seems rushed and it’s unclear why.

“At this point, the timeline presented by the District in their re-opening plan is not workable with all of the changes that have yet to be made to ensure staff and students are safe in our schools,” President Jan Giles said. “Positivity rates must be 5% or lower before putting students and staff at risk, and we demand that the Trustees and administrators acknowledge that Education Support Professionals are crucial to the well-being of students. We are not expendable, but that’s the message we are receiving.”

Returning to campuses

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Clark County School District — with the exception of [seven rural campuses](#) — has been operating under full distance-learning protocols since school began in late August.

In a Monday night statement, the school district said return dates to campuses and work sites “may be adjusted and could change based on evolving health conditions and forthcoming information.”

If the plan is approved, employees would return to work sites Dec. 1. And schools would be allowed to bring back individual students or small groups to campuses starting Dec. 1 for screenings, orientations and mental health services.

Employees may choose to bring their own children ages 4 to 18 with them during contracted work hours from Dec. 1-18 if their supervisor approves it in writing and if the employee maintains “direct supervision of the child,” according to the transition plan.

The first group of hybrid students — preschool through second graders, sixth graders, 11th graders and 12th graders, and self-contained programs in all grade levels — would head back to classrooms Jan. 4. Full-time, in-person instruction would start Jan. 4 at rural schools and small urban schools approved to operate under that model. All remaining students would return to hybrid instruction Jan. 11.

School Board Vice President Linda Cavazos wrote Monday night on Twitter that trustees saw the transition plan for the first time the night it was posted online. “We received a one hour briefing this afternoon. I have NOT had a chance to read the whole plan yet. I assure you that we will all read the entire document,” she tweeted.

In a separate post, Cavazos wrote she knows she’s not the only trustee who’s reading a flood of emails. “People are upset, and we understand that. Despite the news reports, this has not been discussed or voted on yet.”

The transition plan covers topics such as cleaning protocols, classroom capacity, when employees would be quarantined, what types of personal protective equipment certain groups of employees would use, and how school lunches and busing would work.

The city of Henderson released a letter Tuesday night written Nov. 2 by Mayor Debra March to the board supporting the school district moving forward with a plan to reopen schools.

“School districts both inside and outside our state have safely reopened their campuses using protocols that are designed to protect the health of students, teachers and support staff and CCSD should look to these models as a source of information that can be used to create a plan allowing for the limited resumption of in-person classes by the second semester of the 2020-2021 school year,” she wrote.

Reaction from parents

Rebecca Dirks Garcia, one of the administrators for the CCSD Parents Facebook group — which has about 14,000 members — and president of the Nevada PTA, said Tuesday that comments from parents on the transition plan have been mixed.

But she said one of the common themes from parents focuses on “the direct amount of upheaval on individual kids.”

Dirks Garcia said some parents see a need for their child to receive in-person instruction, even for minimal hours, while others are looking at the details of hybrid instruction and are “not sure it’s worth it enough to mess with what’s already happening.”

Dirks Garcia said she's hearing a recognition that "this is probably the worst timing possible" in terms of considering in-person classes while COVID-19 case numbers are rising. But "for the families who really see the need for in-person instruction, that need is regardless of what the testing positivity rate is."

Regardless of the decision the school board makes, the majority of students will spend the majority of their time in a distance learning environment, Dirks Garcia said. "That's one of the things the plan doesn't really address."

Las Vegas parent Christine Wilson said her eighth-grader has been more focused learning from home and is getting better grades. But she said he misses his friends and needs those interactions.

"We think the hybrid plan of a day or two per week would be beneficial when cases trend back down," she said in an email to the Review-Journal.

Las Vegas parent Erica Downing said if schools do reopen for in-person classes, her children will be there because they're "super healthy kids" and while her husband already had COVID-19 and it made him horribly sick, her children didn't catch it.

"However, I feel that in no way should the district force teachers to go back if not comfortable," she wrote in an email to the Review-Journal, adding they should be able to make a decision on an individual basis like parents can about whether to send their child back.

"Forcing teachers to go back in to schools is not fair," she wrote, noting it will spur too many teachers to quit or retire early, or understandably cause resentment toward parents who decided to send their children back in-person.

Other school districts

The Washoe County School District — which covers the Reno area and has about 62,000 students and 8,000 employees — is operating this school year with full-time in-person classes for elementary schoolers, and under a hybrid model for middle and high schoolers. About one-third of its students have opted for fully distance learning.

The school board was slated to meet Tuesday night to consider COVID-19 case updates and whether to make any changes to school operations amid growing case numbers.

The **Council of the Great City Schools** — an advocacy organization for 76 of the nation's largest urban school districts, including Clark County School District — released a list to the Review-Journal Tuesday of what instructional model other districts are using.

As of Friday, more than 40 districts — including Clark County — hadn't reopened for in-person learning, although some have allowed small groups of students to return or have plans to reopen this winter.

Wall Street Journal

As Covid-19 Cases Surge, School Districts Ponder Closing Doors

More is now known about remote learning and health officials have a better grasp on how the disease spreads among children

By

Lee Hawkins *and* Yoree Koh

NOVEMBER 13, 2020

School districts nationwide are split on their closing plans as community infection rates vary and transmission in many locations has been relatively contained.

Cities such as Detroit, Boston and Baltimore have shut down or scaled back in-person learning [because of increases in coronavirus cases](#). Other large school systems including Chicago and Philadelphia that didn't reopen schools during the fall term are deciding to keep students at home longer.

Meanwhile, schools in Oregon, Texas and elsewhere are keeping schools open despite increases in infections.

Of the nation's 75 largest school districts, 36 didn't reopen this fall for in-person learning, while 33 have welcomed students back to the classroom, according to data compiled by the [Council of the Great City Schools](#). Six districts reopened for in-person learning this fall but have since reversed course.

Schools that offer in-person learning adopted varied and often expensive measures to make schools safe including requiring social distancing, mask-wearing and sanitizing. Many districts have "hybrid" or "blended" schedules that cut down the number of students in classrooms by allowing students to only attend in person a few days a week and learn remotely on other days.

Schools have struggled since spring with closure decisions because many parents need to work and lack child care, and some families lack internet connectivity or the resources to help students with online learning. Others have [questioned the quality of remote learning](#).

Gov. Kate Brown of Oregon said recently that Covid-19 will continue to be part of life for a while when announcing new metrics that would allow more students to return to in-person classes. New cases in Oregon increased Thursday to 1,122, a new one-day high. The state's total cumulative count climbed to 53,779.

As back-to-school season approaches, districts across the country are grappling with concerns over student and teacher safety. In Quincy, Ill., public schools are using a popular hybrid model to reopen. WSJ's Doug Belkin visited the school days before students are set to arrive. (Originally published Aug. 14, 2020)

Some schools have seen sporadic Covid-19 outbreaks, but the infection rate in schools and among children is relatively low. Emily Oster, a Brown University economist, collected [nationwide data that showed an overall rate](#) of about 1.5 infections among 1,000 students in districts with in-person classes during two weeks in late September. The data showed 2.5 infections among 1,000 employees. About 570,274 children ages 5 to 17 years old have had Covid-19, or about 7.5% of U.S. cases in which the patient's age was available, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Seventy-three children in that group have died. Roughly 56 million children attend prekindergarten through 12th grade.

New York City, home of the nation's largest school district, saw its seven-day average positivity rate hit 2.6% on Tuesday, up from 2.31% a day earlier. If it hits 3%, it could trigger a shutdown to the city's public school system in the coming days.

The city's mayor, Bill de Blasio, is among leaders who have stressed the role in-person interaction plays in the social and emotional learning and development of children. But he might have to close down the district if cases keep rising.

“There’s still a chance to turn that around, but we’re preparing for that possibility,” Mr. de Blasio said Thursday. If the rate hits or exceeds 3% on a seven-day rolling average, “then we will move immediately—the next day, schools will be shut down,” he said.

United Federation of Teachers President Michael Mulgrew said that in the event of a closure, the union will urge the city’s Department of Education to be “very vigilant” about returning to remote classes until the rate falls below 3%. He stressed that many school buildings host children from several different neighborhoods, which could cause the virus to spread more quickly.

In Arizona, the state Department of Health Services recently made it tougher to shut down schools, recommending that schools meet three benchmarks for severe community spread instead of one. The Arizona School Administrators and the Arizona School Boards Association pushed back, saying school districts had discretion on these decisions and should “adhere to their original plans.”

Arizona is currently experiencing a 9.7% positivity rate and 3,708 cases per 100,000 population, according to the Arizona Department of Health Services.

The Philadelphia school district, which serves about 203,000 students, took the opposite approach, saying Tuesday that it would push back its return to in-person learning until further notice. Pennsylvania recorded a new daily high of 5,488 new Covid-19 cases on Thursday, according to the state’s department of health.

Monica Lewis, a spokeswoman for the Philadelphia school district, said that the combination of the uptick in cases and concern about travel around Thanksgiving made the district’s latest decision to pause its plan “a no-brainer.”

Jess Davis, of Brooklyn, N.Y., said she doesn’t believe schools should be closed when studies show they aren’t where the transmission is happening.

“My son is eating outside in his courtyard at school in the drizzling rain, but yet we’re allowing people to eat indoors from different houses,” Ms. Davis said. “It just doesn’t really translate.”

But other parents, including Brooklyn resident Paullette Ha, are hoping Mr. de Blasio does close schools if the city reaches the 3% threshold.

Ms. Ha said that many schools weren’t equipped for safe in-person learning and that she would like to see officials use another school shutdown to rethink their plans on moving forward.

“We cannot risk what happened in March happening again now,” she said, “just to make people comfortable.”

Kirk Schneider, who teaches three in-person classes to five English as a Second Language and special-needs students at Urban Assembly Gateway School for Technology in Manhattan, said he believes a closure will mean students “that really benefit from getting into the building every day” will suffer, but not learning.

“We’ve been ready for this, so it’s not going to change our education much, when we have to go full remote,” he said. “It’s not like it was in March.”

—*Maya Goldman and Valerie Bauerlein contributed to this article.*

Cleveland.com

How much has the coronavirus set kids back in school? It's difficult to quantify, experts say

Updated Nov 16, 6:00 AM; Posted Nov 16, 6:00 AM

By [Emily Bamforth, cleveland.com](#)

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Educators know about the “summer slide,” the term used to describe the learning kids lose when they’re away from school on summer vacation.

The same phenomenon can apply to the learning lost during the coronavirus pandemic, but education researchers haven’t been able to gather complete data on the extent of the problem. With many students still out of school and dealing with the effects of the pandemic, experts might not be able to gather the data to get a nationwide, or even statewide, picture. So while individual districts may be able to gauge how their students are doing, there’s no big-picture look.

That’s important for making policy decisions, and as a community, knowing where to put resources. Many parents use standardized testing as a marker for how well students are matching up with state standards.

But standardized testing was canceled in the spring, and experts say testing this fall could have some flaws. The Ohio Senate introduced a bill to file an exemption with the federal government, to allow more time for districts and students to stabilize before testing. That will likely not happen, as the Department of Education pre-empted those requests with public statements that there will be no waivers this year.

So now, tests are still on the horizon. But do those really assess how an individual student is doing during the pandemic, soothing frazzled parents’ nerves about learning loss?

Experts say standardized testing, which parents are familiar with as a benchmark, combined with formative testing, which happens in classrooms -- and online -- throughout the course of the school year, will provide a complete picture. Teachers take responsibility for formative testing, using quizzes, activities and other tools to regularly assess a student’s progress.

“Many teachers have a fairly good grasp right now of what’s going on, and the kind of learning loss that’s happening,” said Indiana University associate professor David Rutkowski. “That would be at an individual, school level, where the teachers are able

to gauge and maybe even teachers with experience can go back to previous years and look back at scores on tests that they've given in the past to be able to gauge that."

That doesn't mean looking at the report card at the end of the year, which looks back on student progress. Formative assessments should allow teachers to immediately assess a student's progress and allow them to adjust learning to the student or class.

Jacob Burgoon, an assistant teaching professor at Bowling Green State University's College of Education and Human Development, said he's implemented formative assessments in his own online classes. There are different tools that teachers use, like Flipgrid, where students can take quizzes and do minute presentations on what they've learned and have conversations. Teachers can monitor that to see how students are engaging and how well they're learning material.

"Those kinds of formative assessments, I think, are the key because, number one, they are quicker to administer," Burgoon said. "Students that have been out of the classroom for a long time, when they come in, and then you give them a standardized test, I think they're gonna be like, 'Oh, right, I remember why I hate school.' There's the motivational aspect right there. Secondly, they seem less threatening, and they're more open for teacher feedback. The teacher is going to respond to the task the student just did and can help them immediately."

[Education publication EdWeek surveyed 12 education assessment and instruction experts](#) and came to the same conclusion: immediately testing students when they return to the classroom after an extended absence can be overwhelming. Instead districts should focus on assessing through teaching and avoid using tests as "gatekeepers."

Schools also use diagnostic tests to see how well students are performing to the state standard, which could provide information when compared to previous years. The Ohio Department of Education [released a test bank of questions previously used in state tests for districts to use for assessments](#). The difference here is that using these banks of questions aren't as "high stakes" as standardized testing, which can have profound effects.

Standardized tests, aside from informing a student's path, are usually a factor in teacher evaluations and district report cards. This year, the Department of Education clarified that [certain types of student data shouldn't be used in teacher evaluations, if given](#). [District report cards were issued this year](#), but didn't contain any standardized testing data because of the canceled tests in the spring.

"Teachers and administrators far too often end up confusing scale scores with a student's capacity to learn," [Council of the Great City Schools leaders](#) wrote in restart guidance. "Based on standardized assessment data, teachers place kids into high or low ability groups or provide low levels of instructional rigor to lower performing

students. This is not an effective strategy for addressing unfinished learning, and not an appropriate use of assessment data.”

Instead, the council recommends using assessments as “temperature checks,” for how students are doing. [Cleveland schools CEO Eric Gordon](#), who serves as council chair, previously spoke to how the pandemic could prompt the district to unlink time from progress, moving toward a model where grades are viewed as bands with learning benchmarks rather than strict years.

Accountability for teachers and schools is often closely tied with standardized testing, but the pandemic revealed layers of how schools need to operate.

[Andrew Ho, a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education](#), said first schools need to keep tabs on students who may have disconnected and make sure they’re engaged and physically healthy. Then, schools must deal with how kids are doing socially and emotionally. Without understanding those components, it’s difficult to use tests to assess learning loss because the baseline is not the same.

Rutkowski said it’s likely students, no matter the learning situation, will experience some kind of negative impact this school year. Early projections from organizations showed a potential jarring learning loss from the pandemic, with [testing organization NWEA projecting that students might return to school with 75%](#) of the learning they would have otherwise had in English, and as little as 50% in math. Now, projections aren’t shaping up to be as drastic as initially thought, Ho said.

On an individual level, Rutkowski said parents should make sure their students are staying engaged and talk to them about learning, but also remain in constant contact with teachers.

“The standardized assessment is another check, it’s another indicator, but it’s truly the teacher who has the best idea about the student’s learning,” he said. “These people are professionals. This is what they’re paid to do and this is what they’re paid to understand.”

Wall Street Journal

EDUCATION

Why Some Schools Close as Covid-19 Cases Rise When Others Stay Open

Decisions often depend on a community's density, resources for safety steps, political atmosphere and local risk tolerance



Detroit schools suspended in-person learning last week as the coronavirus test positivity rate neared 5%. Thirkell Elementary-Middle School teachers and students saying goodbye Friday.

PHOTO: RYAN GARZA DETROIT FREE PRESS REUTERS

By [Leslie Brody](#) and [Yoree Koh](#)

Updated Nov. 19, 2020 2 32 pm ET



In New York City, when 3% of tests for Covid-19 are positive, schools close. In Indianapolis, the trigger is 13%.

As the coronavirus pandemic surges, cities and school districts—even those located near each other—are making closure decisions based on differing criteria. Nationwide, the triggers for shutting classrooms vary widely, as do the sets of authorities who make the calls.

Complicating the decision: The understanding of the virus has been changing since schools across the country closed in the spring and sent more than 50 million students to remote learning. Since then, some studies show that schools aren't major contributors to community spread. Some researchers say decisions to close often depend on a community's density, transportation patterns, resources for safety steps, political atmosphere and local risk tolerance, as well as trends in the pandemic.

New York City, the nation's largest school district and one that had stood out this fall for committing to bringing students back to classrooms, said Wednesday that it will temporarily go remote-only, because 3% of the city's virus tests were positive over a seven-day average, a trigger Mayor Bill de Blasio set this summer in a deal with the teachers union. To families who called on the city to continue in-person learning, the mayor said a rigorous safety standard is needed to instill confidence in parents and staff.

A number of other districts have announced closures in recent weeks after thresholds were surpassed, including Pittsburgh Public Schools and Connecticut's Bridgeport Public Schools. As of Tuesday, a dozen of the country's largest school districts have reverted or plan to return to virtual learning after reopening in-person this fall, up from six districts last week, according to information compiled by the Council of the Great City Schools.

Detroit Public Schools Community District announced last week it was suspending in-person learning as the local coronavirus test positivity rate had nearly reached its threshold of 5%.

And in Indianapolis, the public health department ordered private and public K-12 schools to return to virtual learning by Nov. 30, as the rate in Marion County reached 10.3% last week. Starting Nov. 23, public schools will be remote-only. Officials expected the area to hit the previously set threshold of 13% by the end of this week.

Part of the reason why the thresholds for closing or opening schools are so scattered may be because there is no science-based consensus on what the trigger should be.

“To me it’s a pretty arbitrary decision to choose a cutoff point whether it’s 2%, 5% or 10%,” said Art Reingold, professor of epidemiology at the School of Public Health at University of California at Berkeley. While it’s known that a higher rate of infection is worse, there haven’t been any studies showing at what point it gets to be too dangerous to keep schools open, said Dr. Reingold.

“I don’t know how you make a choice of a particular percentage. I don’t know how you base that on science. I don’t think we have the data to say that 5% is the right figure or 3% is the right figure,” said Dr. Reingold. As a result, school systems and health officials are talking to different experts who are recommending different metrics.



New York City schools are going remote now that the city’s positivity rate has hit 3%. West Brooklyn Community High School in late October.

PHOTO: KATHY WILLENS ASSOCIATED PRESS

A growing body of research in the U.S. and Europe finds that because of safety procedures, schools and child-care facilities aren’t major vectors of Covid-19 transmission.

A dashboard launched by a Brown University professor tracking thousands of schools has found that through early November, infection positivity rates of students at schools with in-person learning were generally lower than the rates in the surrounding communities. A recent study in Spain found that keeping schools and day-cares open during that country’s second surge of infections didn’t increase the risk of transmission of the virus.

With daily Covid-19 cases more than tripling since many schools opened in September, there is no national tracking of school-based cases or data-driven directives for what it should take to keep schools open.

A high positivity rate in the community often weighs in favor of closing a district. But without specific metrics for decision-making, debates can be hard to settle. In the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County school district in North Carolina, more than 600 people tuned in to watch a meeting Tuesday night during which discussions over the issue grew heated. Some pleaded with the board to open schools to more students, while others argued for a delay. The district brought prekindergarten, kindergarten and first-graders back for the first time this month.

The county has seen its test positivity rate rise to 14% for a two-week period, according to district data, and in that period, there were 400 new cases per 100,000 residents.

Most teachers who addressed the board said going back on campus wasn't safe. "Asking me to go into a battlefield of Covid germs and risk my life is above my call of duty," said one teacher.

One mom grew teary as she talked of her daughter, who had been a strong student, failing five classes in the virtual setting. And an elementary student declared, "I want to go back to school because my head hurts from looking at a screen all day and I miss my friends."

The district's lack of specific metrics makes consensus harder to reach, some said. "Can we be focused on agreeing on a set of metrics so that the community can see in reality what it is that we need to do to feel like it's safe?" asked board member Elisabeth Motsinger.

Board Chair Malishai Woodbury cautioned against hard cutoffs, saying many variables must be considered. The board voted to delay bringing back students in grades 2 through 12 until January.

Federal officials have given few specific prescriptions on thresholds for shutting schools, saying local circumstances and mitigation steps should inform decisions.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says there is a "higher risk" of transmission in schools, for example, when the community has an 8% to 10% test

positivity rate, and 50 to 200 new cases per 100,000 residents in the previous two weeks, and only one or two of five recommended mitigation steps are taken.

The measures include correct use of masks, social distancing, hand washing, cleaning and contact tracing. The agency defines “moderate risk” as a 5% to 8% positivity rate in the community, 20 to 49 cases among 100,000 people in two weeks, and three or four mitigation steps implemented.

Whether schools close or stay open can depend on who makes the decision. Health departments, governors, mayors, school boards and teachers unions have varying degrees of say in different locations.

The Montgomery County Office of Public Health in Pennsylvania, for example, has ordered that all public and private schools go fully remote from Nov. 23 through Dec. 6 because of a jump in cases in the area and concern about Thanksgiving get-togethers.

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS

How are schools in your area responding to the latest surge of coronavirus? Join the conversation below.

In many districts, teachers unions are powerful in negotiating policies.

Los Angeles Unified School District and a major union, the Associated Administrators of Los Angeles, said Friday they reached an agreement on how to return for in-person instruction as soon as possible. They didn't specify a date and the plan needs board approval, but said all of the nearly 700,000 students and 75,000 staff members would have to be tested before coming back to campus.

Earlier this month, Los Angeles Superintendent Austin Beutner said it is unlikely that the district will reopen before January because the city is still above the guidelines that state authorities set for schools to bring students back in large numbers. Schools that are in cities placed in the state's purple tier—meaning a positivity rate of higher than 8%—can't reopen.

“There's only one path back to schools, and it starts with a lower overall level of Covid-19 in the area,” said Mr. Beutner in a community update last week.

For more education news visit the [WSJ Education page](#).

—*Robbie Whelan contributed to this article.*

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New York Times

A Week in the Life of a Baltimore School Getting Back to Class

As school districts diverge on handling the pandemic, Baltimore City Public Schools are slowly trying to get students back in the classroom. It has not been easy, but neither has remote learning.

by Erica L. Green

Nov. 28, 2020 Updated 10:21 a.m. ET

BALTIMORE — Zia Hellman prepared to welcome her kindergarten students back to Walter P. Carter Elementary/Middle School this month the way any teacher would on the first day of school: She fussed over her classroom.

Ms. Hellman, 26, dodged around the triangular desks, spaced six feet apart and taped off in blue boxes. She fretted about the blandness of the walls, fumbled with the plastic dividers covering name tags and arranged the individual yoga mats that replaced colorful carpets. Every window was open for extra ventilation, chilling the air.

“I wonder how they’re going to react to all of this,” she said, hands on her hips, scanning the room for the last time. “I don’t know what I’m supposed to feel, but it feels right.”

Ms. Hellman was among about two dozen teachers and staff members required to return to work on Nov. 16 for the first in-person instruction in Baltimore City Public Schools since March. The city was the first large school district in Maryland and the **latest among urban districts in the country** to tiptoe into one of the highest-stakes experiments in the history of the nation’s public education system: teaching face-to-face in a pandemic.

Returning to the classroom has not been easy; neither has remote learning.

Educators looking to get back in front of students have had to navigate conflicting guidance from politicians and public health officials. Some teachers’ unions have refused to return to buildings until the virus abates, ostracizing colleagues who dare break with them. On the other hand, the country’s most vulnerable children have sustained severe academic and social harm from the remote-learning experiment. Parents, navigating their own economic and work struggles, are increasingly desperate.

Ms. Hellman has yearned to be back in her school building in northeast Baltimore since September. She also understands the risks.

“I feel like I’m a bit in ‘The Hunger Games,’” Ms. Hellman said. “I didn’t volunteer as tribute, I was chosen as tribute. But I want to be here for my students.”

Superintendents, meantime, have had to navigate a firestorm of political pressure, parental preference and the weight of a once-in-a-lifetime public health crisis.

“Superintendents have always had to deal with conflicting interests, but it’s never been this kind of life-and-death balance,” said Michael Casserly, the executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of large, urban public school systems across the country. “To have interests and decisions changing week to week, day to day, makes this situation unlike anything public education has ever faced.”

For Sonja Santelises, the chief executive officer of Baltimore City Public Schools, the decision to reopen 27 schools on Nov. 16 to about 1,200 academically at-risk students — such as kindergartners, special education students and English-language learners — last week was not a choice but an obligation. She made the call on the advice of the city’s public health commissioner.

“If I were to cling to one-liners or seek to score political points like some people want, I would choose not to see those families who need options, who need translators, those refugee families who walked miles to get their children an education,” Ms. Santelises said. “I will not do that.”

Baltimore reduced the number of planned building reopenings to 27 from 44 as the virus surged in certain parts of the city. But the local teachers’ union is [calling for buildings](#) in Ms. Santelises’ district to stay closed until they are deemed absolutely safe or a vaccine is widely available. It has pressured individual teachers against volunteering to go back and [encouraged parents to boycott](#).

Those tensions reverberate across the country, where schools are grappling with the pandemic in widely varying ways, with some closing this month after opening earlier this fall even as others like in Baltimore just now are trying to reopen.

“We’re not just being obstructionist; we’re obstructing the district from putting people’s lives at risk,” said Diamonté Brown, the president of the Baltimore Teachers Union.

More than 70,000 schoolchildren left Baltimore classrooms in March, when the coronavirus outbreak in the United States was declared a pandemic. Since then, school leaders have focused on temporary measures. They bought computers and internet-access devices, sent worksheets to students’ homes, staffed their cafeterias and buses to serve meals to their communities, and waited for direction from local and federal health officials that never really came.

But now, with the pandemic threatening to derail the education and prospects of a generation of children, district leaders are feeling pressure to move on their own.

In Washington, D.C., internal testing data shows steep declines in the number of kindergartners through second grade students meeting literacy benchmarks, [The](#)

[Washington Post reported](#). In Houston, huge numbers of middle and high school students are failing their first semester, [according to The Houston Chronicle](#). Even affluent, high-performing districts like Fairfax County, Va., a Washington suburb, are [reporting alarming rates](#) of middle and high school students failing classes, particularly English-language learners and students with disabilities — two populations that a recent [Government Accountability Office report](#) found were poorly served by remote learning.

Among the most alarming statistics are the significant enrollment declines that districts across the country are experiencing, [particularly among kindergartners](#). Public education is out of reach for some families without internet access or with home lives that are uncondusive to remote leaning. Some families have simply given up.

‘My Mask Is on My Face’

Ms. Hellman, in her fourth year of teaching kindergarten, understood what returning to the classroom would mean. She would not be able to see her 92-year-old grandmother. She might be subject to “corona-shaming” by colleagues, family and friends who have stayed away from work. She was putting herself personally at risk.

But, she reasoned, “I’m young, I’m healthy.”

At 9:15 a.m., each of the six students whose families had opted for in-person learning in her classroom received temperature checks. Two minutes later, one student was excitedly holding his mask up to show her its design.

“I love your mask,” Ms. Hellman told him, “but I think it would be cuter on.”

At 9:30, all the students were allowed to remove their masks to snack on Cinnamon Toast Crunch and applesauce. “It’s only 10 minutes,” she told them and herself, “and the windows are open.”

By 10:30, things had settled down, and she was just a teacher. Students were practicing writing their letters. By 11, they were preparing for recess by singing to the tune of “The Farmer in the Dell”:

My mask is on my face.

My mask is on my face.

Masks keep you and me safe.

My mask is on my face.

“The purpose of the first day is to feed them, have fun and send them home,” Ms. Hellman said. “We need them to come back the next day.”

Not only did her six in-class students return that next day, but so did 19 of her students learning virtually. So did Brandon Pinkney, the school's principal, who was showing her classroom to a parent who was considering sending her son back.

In the 24 hours since in-person classes resumed, Mr. Pinkney was fielding inquiries from parents intrigued by what they were seeing in the classroom through their children's computer screens at home.

He canvassed the building, popping his head into different classrooms and mentally reconfiguring the spaces, just in case. He was hoping to reserve an extra desk for a student who told him bluntly that he was done with "that virtual stuff" but would return if the school reopened.

"I know he's in the streets," Mr. Pinkney said. "If I don't see him this week, I'm going to get him."

Many staff members in the school said they had only returned to the building because it was Mr. Pinkney's voice on the line, telling them that they had been chosen.

He promised transparency and support, and that was enough for Rachael Charles. A special-education teacher with two teenagers at home, she wasn't as easy to persuade as Ms. Hellman, who acknowledged that as a young, childless teacher, she did not face the same choice between her life and livelihood.

With the Black community disproportionately affected by the virus, Ms. Charles, who is African-American, had been working out over the summer, taking vitamins and alkaline water, just in case. But she still explored taking a leave of absence.

"I love my students dearly, but I'm coming back into the classroom to take care of children when no one is taking care of mine," she said.

Safety risks aside, Ms. Charles wondered if she would be able to be the teacher that her students remembered. "I'm very hands-on, and it's hard to have them right in my reach and not support them the way they need," she said.

When a student with a slight physical disability struggled to pull his mask down to eat lunch, she initially stood outside his blue box, encouraging him. "Under your chin, you can do it."

But before long, her hand was on his mouth, and she pulled it down herself.

Downstairs, Mr. Pinkney was in a hallway with a group of clinicians debating whether to do virtual or in-person special education assessments.

"It doesn't make sense to do them virtually when we have assessment rooms here," he said. "They're cleaned every hour on the hour."

“Every hour?” a skeptical voice could be heard asking over a speakerphone.

“On the hour,” a voice chimed in from nearby.

That voice belonged to Donice Willis, the school custodian. A 66-year-old grandmother of 11, she had never stopped working during the pandemic, and she could not wait for children to return to the building.

She said she knew that she was among the highest risk groups for the coronavirus. She hopes to retire at 70, but she said she had relinquished control of that goal to the same higher power she hopes is protecting her from Covid-19.

“You’re going to go one day from something,” Ms. Willis said. “If God gives me 70, I’ll take it.”

When a maskless student walked out of a classroom she was preparing to clean, she barely flinched: “Put your mask on, pookie,” she said.

‘Hold the Line’: A Superintendent Stands Firm

Around dismissal time on Nov. 18, a Wednesday afternoon, news broke that New York City had reached a [coronavirus positivity threshold of 3 percent](#), which would result in another shutdown of in-person instruction. The city’s schools had been open for less than two months. Within the hour, [Washington city officials announced](#) that talks between district and union officials had fallen apart.

Teachers in Baltimore wondered how their city leaders would react. Maryland’s positivity rate was above 6 percent.

Ms. Santelises stood her ground. The science was strong that transmission rates in schools remained low, she said. A teacher had emailed, “hold the line.”

Ms. Hellman focused on how well her new normal was going. She was wearing two masks now, and she did not have to remind her students to keep theirs on as much. She gushed over how her in-person students waved at her remote pupils. Her only concern was that her remote learners were missing the banter and nonverbal cues her students were getting in the classroom.

“Today was better,” she said. “It just feels like this is how it is, and it’s only been three days.”

Then came the reality check. Shortly after 8:30 a.m. on Thursday, Mr. Pinkney emailed the staff to say someone had reported Covid-like symptoms, and two classes had been sent home to quarantine.

“Oh my God,” Ms. Hellman said. “It’s here.”

Mr. Pinkney followed protocols, alerted classmates and staff members, and submitted the case to the district.

Ms. Hellman felt defeated.

“Covid doesn’t care what day it is,” she said. “It doesn’t care that you have a shield in front of your face, it doesn’t care if you have a mask on most of the day, but not 10 minutes while you’re eating.”

Baltimore announced that same day that schools that had begun offering in-person instruction would not resume it after Thanksgiving until Dec. 7, amid [warnings about holiday gatherings](#) and travel. Some of the private schools in the area had done the same.

The actions of Baltimore’s private schools during the pandemic have weighed heavily on Ms. Santelises. Those students have clearly had an educational advantage, and one of them is her daughter. Two of her other children attend public charter schools that are closed.

“As a mom, I’m living the difference, and the inequity is astounding” Ms. Santelises said. “I’m saying goodbye to one every morning at the bus stop, and I’m watching the difference it makes. I see my daughters’ faces looking at me at home, like: ‘You all aren’t even going to try?’”

The announcement of the new delay spurred members of the teachers’ union to protest, and members marched to different buildings calling for the district to shut down the buildings for the rest of the semester. By the end of the week, at least 15 staff members had tested positive for the virus, the union said.

Ms. Brown, the union leader, said the district was insulting teachers who had been working around the clock to deliver quality instruction to their students at home.

“There’s more to education than teachers standing in front of students teaching a lesson,” she said.

Feeling Like Herself Again

On Friday, Ms. Hellman was still standing in front of students. As the day drew to a close, she helped a student draw what he was thankful for. A week in, she was crossing into her students’ blue boxes without much thought.

Outside, as the students played together while awaiting their parents, the directions were even more relaxed: “You can take your mask off, but don’t get too close,” Ms. Hellman said.

Sharrea Brown embraced her 5-year-old daughter, Paige Myers. Over the course of the week, Ms. Brown had watched Paige's mood improve. At home, the frustrated child would yell "You're not my teacher!" when she tried to help.

Paige said she was nervous about the "bad germ," so she has a message for other children who want to go back to school: "Keep your mask on."

Ms. Brown was hopeful that with school open, she could also resume some normalcy. She took a leave of absence from her job in March, and her unemployment was stretching only so far.

"Christmas ain't looking too good," Ms. Brown said. "But she's good," she said of her daughter. "She's almost back to feeling like herself again."

Wall Street Journal

Largest U.S. Public-School Districts Revert to Remote Learning

By [Yoree Koh](#)

December 4, 2020

[As new reported Covid-19 cases](#) surge to new highs, the nation's largest public-school districts that had opened for in-person classes this fall continue to retreat to virtual learning.

According to the [Council of the Great City Schools](#), 18 of the country's 75-largest public-school districts have reverted back to remote learning in the past month. Three of those districts—Birmingham, Ala., Tulsa, Okla., and Wichita, Kan. —made such a decision this week.

At the same time, New York City, the country's largest school district, is reopening schools for younger students Monday [after closing the district in November](#), when the city's seven-day average positivity rate surpassed 3%. That rate is now above 5%.

New York Times

New York City elementary schools are reopening while other cities move in the opposite direction.

December 7, 2020

New York City is reopening some of its public schools Monday in the teeth of a worsening coronavirus outbreak.

The decision to do so reflects [changing public health thinking](#) around the importance of keeping schools operating, particularly for young students, and the real-world experience of over two months of in-person classes in the city's school system, the nation's largest.

Schools around the country have had to make the difficult decision of when to close and what metrics to follow, with some staying open amid local positivity rates in the teens and others using low single-digit thresholds.

Of the nation's 75 largest public school districts, 18 have gone back to remote learning in the past month, according to data compiled by the [Council of the Great City Schools](#) and [reported in The Wall Street Journal](#).

In California, many of the biggest school districts were already closed before [new restrictions](#) took effect on Sunday in three regions of the state. The new restrictions include stay-at-home orders, but do not require schools that had reopened to close again (an earlier version of this item incorrectly said they do). In the last week, California has reported more than 150,000 new cases, a record for all states.

Decisions to shutter schools have often been made on the local level and in inconsistent ways. Some schools have "paused" for short periods of time — [as was the case in dozens of Central Texas districts](#) or recently in Delaware, at the [governor's suggestion](#). Others have opted for blended learning with some days in school and some days remote.

Many have endured jarring periods of closing, opening and closing again. All of the solutions seem to be leading to [burnout, instability and turmoil](#). New York City students, parents and teachers have felt their own whiplash, from a [full shutdown before Thanksgiving](#) to [a partial reopening less than three weeks later](#).

Mayor Bill de Blasio has committed himself to keeping schools open, his aides say, and has started with elementary schools and those for students with severe disabilities. (About 190,000 children in the grades and schools the city is reopening this week would be eligible.)

Three of the country's largest districts — in Birmingham, Ala., Tulsa, Okla., and Wichita, Kan. — made the opposite decision and closed over the past week. In Birmingham, the

superintendent said the pandemic was [“drastically impacting our community and our schools.”](#) In Tulsa, [two public school employees died](#) recently after testing positive for the virus. And several of Wichita’s public schools had [so many staff members quarantined](#) that they could hardly cover vacancies by the time the district decided to close, the superintendent said.

The United States has diverged from other countries around the world in closing schools but leaving indoor dining and bars open. Many parents have criticized that situation, saying that risks of infection are higher in restaurants and bars and that it prioritizes the economy over education. Across Europe and Asia, students, especially very young ones, [have largely continued going to school](#) while other parts of daily life have shut down.

While Mr. de Blasio’s decision was applauded by many parents, there is no guarantee that the pattern of chaos that they have faced will abate as the fall turns to winter. New York City’s rules for handling positive cases all but guarantee frequent and sudden closures of individual classrooms and school buildings.

And it remains unclear whether the city will be able to reopen its middle and high schools to in-person learning any time soon.

One thing that could hamper the city’s efforts, officials cautioned, is a truly rampant second wave in New York.

The test positivity rate has only increased since the city closed schools, and the seven-day rolling average rate exceeded 5 percent last week. Hospitalizations have quickly mounted. Still, Mr. de Blasio said on Monday that “the schools in this city are among the safest places to be.” He noted that later this week the city planned to reopen some schools on Staten Island, even though the borough has seen positive infection test rates surge recently.

NBC News



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[Council of the great city schools on KRBC \(NBC\) - Abilene, TX](#)

Abilene Midday

12/8/2020 11:32:19 AM

there's even discord among school districts ... (gfx) source: council of the great city schools of the nation's top 76 school systems... 27 are at least partially teaching in-person...



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[Council of the great city schools on WEEK \(NBC\) - Peoria, IL](#)

News 25 Mid-Day

12/8/2020 11:34:00 AM

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WDAM 7 Midday

12/8/2020 12:03:32 PM

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News 4 Tucson at Noon

12/8/2020 12:03:38 PM

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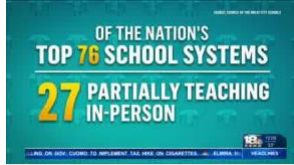
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WETM 18 News at Noon

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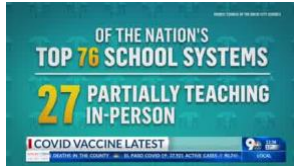
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[Council of the great city schools on KOB-ABQ \(NBC\) - Albuquerque, NM](#)

Eyewitness News 4 at MIDDAY

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WAVE 3 News at 3:00PM

12/8/2020 3:04:29 PM

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Education Week

Remote Learning Will Keep a Strong Foothold Even After the Pandemic, Survey Finds

By [Denisa R. Superville](#) — December 15, 2020

When the pandemic is over, there's at least one thing that's likely to stick around in many K-12 schools: online learning.

Twenty percent of district and charter management organizations said in a new survey that they had started or were planning a virtual school or fully remote option this academic year and expected those options would remain after the pandemic. Another 10 percent said the same about hybrid or blended learning, while 7 percent said some lesser version of remote learning will continue when the pandemic is in the rearview mirror. Those are among the findings from a new survey of leaders of nearly 300 traditional school districts and charter management organizations that was released by the Rand Corporation on Tuesday. The survey also revealed that school system leaders had major anxiety about their ability to address students' emotional well-being and mental health as well as concerns about disparities in the opportunities students have to access schooling, especially among leaders running systems where at least half the enrollment are eligible to receive free and reduced-price meals or are Black and Hispanic.

The survey is the first of its kind of district leaders by RAND, which has conducted similar polling from its panels of teachers and principals.

When district leaders noted the staying power of remote learning beyond the pandemic, they cited increased flexibility for students, parent or student demand, and addressing a variety of students' needs among the reasons. And virtual schools were the "innovative practice" that most system leaders foresaw lasting for years.

Remote learning and virtual schools have been challenging for many students and districts, particularly those serving large numbers of students in poverty, where lack of devices and internet access continue to be a problem. Some students are often juggling multiple duties – balancing schoolwork and household chores. And [across the country, millions of students have not logged on.](#)

"It's notable that school districts plan to offer more online options. Some students and teachers really value the flexibility," said Robin Lake, director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education, which worked with RAND and Chiefs for Change to set up the district leaders' panel. "Now the challenge will be to ensure virtual schoolrooms provide high-quality instruction and equitable access."

CRPE has examined school districts' reopening and operating plans for the new school year and [recently published a deep dive into six school systems' remote learning programs](#).

Public education will never be the same post– COVID-19. The pandemic has forced public education to adopt new practices on the fly, and many will become lasting changes to the way we do business. Flexible scheduling and virtual instruction are just two practices that will become a part of how we educate children.

With district leaders expecting some form of remote learning to be a mainstay of their educational programs in the future, RAND recommends more state and federal aid to help districts improve technology, including expanding internet access, hire qualified teaching staff, and partner with organizations to provide additional academic supports—like tutoring—to help students. It also emphasized the need for “coherent, high-quality instructional systems for online instruction in academics and social and emotional learning,” as well as continued professional development for teachers, especially those working with students with IEPs and English-language learners. Publishers also must increase support for high-quality instructional materials, and federal funding can help states work with publishers to make those more accessible to school systems, according to RAND.

Internet access also continues to be a top concern for school system leaders, especially those running systems where at least half of the students qualify for free and reduced-price meals or are Black or Hispanic. Forty-four percent of those school systems' leaders said internet access was an area in which they needed support and guidance this school year, according to the survey. And 40 percent of those leaders said making sure that teachers and students were able to access the internet for remote learning was a “significant challenge.” Only slightly more than a quarter, 26 percent, of leaders in schools where fewer than half the students lived in poverty or were Black and Hispanic said the same.

SEL, Student Mental Health Are Major Challenges

Overall, addressing students' emotional well-being and mental health continued to be the overwhelming challenge for school system leaders this academic year, with 67 percent of those leading school systems where fewer than half of the enrollment qualified for free and reduced-priced meals listing SEL and student mental health as the area they most needed guidance and resources. Among those leading school systems with higher numbers of poor students, that number was 53 percent.

Providing specialized instructional supports for students and delivering high-quality instruction to all students also ranked among the top three areas where system leaders needed additional resources and guidance, according to the survey.

The survey, conducted between Sept. 15 and Nov. 11, included seven questions that

covered areas such as staffing challenges, professional development, and approaches to the 2020-21 school year.

The survey was sent to leaders in 317 regular public-school districts and charter management organizations, who are part of RAND's district panel. The response rate was 84 percent.

School system leaders expected dealing with disparities in students' opportunities to learn to be the most significant challenge this school year, with half of the respondents anticipating that to be the case. Again, that need was even more pronounced in systems serving large numbers of students in poverty, with 62 percent of those leaders saying that was the case. Even among their colleagues leading lower-poverty districts, 39 percent said they expected addressing disparities in students' opportunities to learn would be a major hurdle this school year, according to the survey.

Forty-five percent of high-poverty systems also expected state accountability requirements to be a top challenge this year.

School system leaders expected funding to ensure adequate staffing to be a major barrier this school year, with that concern more heightened in systems serving fewer students in poverty. While 39 percent of the respondents overall said they expected funding to be a "major hindrance" to staffing this year, 45 percent of those leading systems with fewer numbers of students in poverty said that was the case. Slightly more than a quarter, 26 percent, were worried about not having enough qualified instructional staff to cover teaching.

Surprisingly, the number of teachers with health issues did not rank high on the list of concerns, with only 9 percent of leaders listing it as an area of worry. And they said their staff needed professional development in a wide variety of areas, especially in addressing students' social and emotional well-being, learning loss, and the needs of English-language learners and students with Individualized Education Programs, or IEPs.

The creation of virtual learning communities for teachers and principals, flexible staffing models for teachers, and adjusting instructional time policies were among the most common approaches districts considered this school year.

Unsurprisingly, school system leaders said guidance from local health departments held more sway over their 2020-21 decisions than the media and the U.S. Department of Education. The latter two ranked behind every other option on the survey, including parents, teachers, community members and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

And only 13 percent said that guidance from national organizations, like AASA, the School Superintendents Association, and the **Council of the Great City Schools**, the national organization that represents 76 urban school systems, influenced their decisions.

Principals held slightly more influence in those decisions in schools where at least half of the students qualified for free and reduced-price meals or were students of color. Interestingly, districts with fewer students in poverty often looked to other districts' plans for guidance in comparison to districts with higher levels of poverty, according to the report.

In answer to an open-ended question, district leaders noted the lack of funding, unclear guidance and substitute teacher shortages as major challenges. Amid all of those difficulties, district leaders highlighted offering students more choices and flexibility as well as delivering meals to students among the bright spots this school year.

There are also some things that districts would like to do but don't have money to: like hiring more tutors to help students back on track. Twenty-four percent of the districts said they'd like to do so, but couldn't afford it or did not have the flexibility. That barrier was more acute in districts and charter management organizations serving fewer students in poverty.

You can read the full report [here](#).

ideastream

Cleveland Schools CEO "Grateful" For COVID Relief Funding For K-12 Schools

[Jenny Hamel](#)

December 22, 2020

The new federal coronavirus relief bill awaiting President Trump's signature includes \$54 billion for K-12 schools nationwide. The amount is four times more than schools received through the CARES Act, passed in March, but far less than what Cleveland Metropolitan School District CEO Eric Gordon asked Congress for this summer.

In June, Gordon told the U.S House Education and Labor Committee that \$200 billion was needed to help K-12 schools deal with the crushing economic impact of the pandemic. Gordon testified as part of the national [Council of the Great City Schools](#), a coalition of 61 superintendents from large urban districts around the country.

Though it's not close to what he said was needed, Gordon said he was "grateful" that Congress had passed the nearly 6000-page pandemic relief package overnight Monday, which he expects will be allocated over time.

"This recovery is not going to be immediate. And so it shouldn't also be a whole bunch of money doled out all at once, it should be patterned over time to make sure that school districts move through this pandemic and into the recovery," Gordon said.

Gordon said the \$26 million in CARES Act funding CMSD received is "long gone" after paying for expenses including personal protective equipment and thousands of digital devices and internet hotspots to support remote learning.

"I understand there's some dollars for infrastructure and we still have this digital divide that has not been solved," said Gordon. "So looking forward to seeing those dollars and dollars to continue the meal plans that we've been providing kids. We're providing far fewer meals, but we're still staffing all of our kitchens."

Shifting to hybrid learning and getting students back into the classroom will require additional funding, Gordon said, because the district will need additional staff.

"We know some kids aren't coming back to school even when we open the doors, so we'll need teachers teaching those remote students," said Gordon, "while there are going to be other kids where we're going to have to have teacher teams, for example, and we may need some substitutes to support that."

Beyond a return to the physical classroom, the big concern for Gordon is helping CMSD students recover from educational loss during the pandemic.

"We lost time for learning. And so the way you recover that is you add time to thinking about weekend opportunities, summer opportunities, evening opportunities, and all of the same people

have to do that work,” said Gordon. “So that means overtime for all of our educators, including the people that keep buildings open, cook food, clean, all of those things. So there's a lot to invest in and it's coming fast.”

Washington Post

Vaccines, dollars and Biden ratchet up pressure on teachers to return to school

By

[Laura Meckler](#),
[Moriah Balingit](#) and
[Valerie Strauss](#)

Dec. 23, 2020 at 8:04 p.m. EST

Teachers, fearful of returning to classrooms during the pandemic, are facing new encouragement — and new pressure — to go back, raising the prospect that in-person school could resume in many communities before the school year is out.

The Centers for Disease Control [recommended](#) Sunday that states prioritize teachers as part of the second group of people eligible for the [coronavirus](#) vaccines.

Two days later, Congress cleared a [coronavirus aid package](#) with \$54 billion for K-12 schools, which, if the president signs it, is expected to help pay expenses associated with in-person education. That could include protective equipment such as masks and plexiglass dividers, upgrades to ventilation systems and additional staffing.

And President-elect Joe Biden is pushing for schools to reopen for in-person teaching. [His nominee for education secretary](#), Miguel Cardona, worked to reopen schools in his home state of Connecticut, and all but one of about 200 districts offered some in-person school at some point this fall.

Biden says he wants most schools open by the 100-day mark of his presidency, this spring. “Reopening schools safely will be a national priority for the Biden-Harris administration,” Biden said Wednesday in introducing Cardona, Connecticut’s schools commissioner. He called his 100-day goal “ambitious but doable.”

Adding to the reopen pressure is [emerging evidence](#) of deep learning losses among children engaged in remote education and growing data showing the virus is not spreading much inside schools.

It puts teachers in a precarious position. Many districts stayed shut because of their fears of going back, and some complain that teachers have gone from heroes to villains in the public mind.

“People loved teachers in March when we were doing all this stuff, and now they think we’re lazy and scared and demanding,” said Sherry East, president of the South Carolina Education Association.

She said that districts operating in person in her state have not seen elevated virus transmission, and it’s possible that teachers overreacted to the risks of return. Nonetheless, she said, teachers are genuinely scared of becoming infected with a deadly disease, particularly as infection rates surge.

“That fear is real for them, whether it’s unwarranted or not. It is a real fear,” she said. She added: “Face-to-face (teaching) is absolutely best for most kids, and we need to get there as quickly as we can.”

The vaccine rollout could be a game changer, although it’s not clear how quickly.

The CDC advisory panel recommended Sunday that teachers be included in the next group of about 30 million “front line essential workers” vaccinated against the coronavirus. That would put teachers alongside people working in meat plants, grocery stores and prisons, as well as about 19 million people age 75 and older.

Each state will decide for itself how to prioritize different groups, and lobbying is intense on behalf of teachers in several states. Some governors have said they will prioritize teachers.

In Utah, Gov. Gary R. Herbert (R) is including teachers in the vaccination group immediately after health-care workers. That means many teachers will get both doses of the vaccine next month.

Salt Lake City school leaders had planned to bring back elementary school students on Jan. 28. Now, citing the vaccines, interim superintendent Larry Madden is asking the school board for approval to reopen middle and high schools on Feb. 8, a week after teachers are scheduled to get their second dose.

In Arizona, [Gov. Doug Ducey](#) (R) signaled the same. “We want our schools open and our teachers protected,” he said this month. “Teachers are essential to our state, so under our plan, they will be prioritized.”

“There appears to be growing impatience on the part of parents to reopen as quickly as we possibly can, and this vaccine and the additional money is going to help us to do that,” said Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of large urban public school systems.

The developments come as some districts are increasing pressure on teachers to return to classrooms.

In Chicago, where the teachers union has resisted, the school system is set to try to force them back. Buildings will begin reopening next month, and some teachers must return as soon as Jan. 4, said Chicago Public Schools spokeswoman Emily Bolton. The Chicago

Teachers Union unsuccessfully petitioned the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Board to halt the reopening plan but has [floated the idea of a strike](#).

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Schools CEO Janice Jackson told the Chicago Sun-Times earlier this month that teachers “don’t have a choice of opting in or out,” unless they are approved for medical leave, and could face consequences for failing to show up.

“If they don’t show up to work, it will be handled the same way it’s handled in any other situation where an employee fails to come to work,” Jackson said.

The union remains concerned about employees returning to classrooms before they are inoculated, and for students who could unwittingly contract the virus and spread it to their classmates. It has raised concerns about ventilation in aging buildings and whether the school system would provide masks for staffers and students.

Teachers have said that they have little trust that the school system will do what is necessary to make buildings safe. Some building were erected in the 19th century, and the school system has about \$3.4 billion in deferred maintenance.

“We want to be able to trust that those things have been done, and that has not always been our experience when it comes to dealing with Chicago public schools, regrettably,” said Tara Stamps, an elementary school teacher who is working for the union.

She said she is particularly concerned that poor neighborhoods, already hit hard by the virus, will not get the sort of mitigation measures they need to keep teachers safe. “We know the city is not equitable and the resources that get disbursed in the city [are] not equitable.”

The new federal funding is meant to address some of these issues, though it’s unclear exactly how districts would use the money or whether it would arrive in time to make a difference this academic year. There are also fears that cash-strapped states, through budgetary sleight of hand, would divert the funding elsewhere.

Still, the \$54 billion allocation is more than four times the \$13.5 billion that K-12 education was previously given.

“There’s no way that Congress can pass \$54 billion and it won’t help some schools open,” said Noelle Ellerson Ng, associate executive director for advocacy and governance at the School Superintendents Association, known as AASA.

In Chicago, for instance, officials anticipate receiving about \$800 million from the relief package, and Jackson said it could help a return to in-person education.

“This crucial federal funding ensures our ability to support the critical resources needed to reopen classrooms,” she said in a statement. She said she would use the money to pay nurses and social workers and provide additional funding for the highest-need schools, among other things.

“Black and Brown families in Chicago need the option to send their children to school this academic year, and this funding relief is essential to the safe and supportive learning environments needed to mitigate learning loss and prevent long-term harm,” she said.

Ng thinks Biden also will make a difference, as the president-elect emphasizes helping schools to reopen rather than bullying them into it.

“He’s not Trump. That’s just a reality,” she said. “Any president who isn’t Trump would get a fresh bite at this push to reopen schools.”

But many teachers are profoundly frightened of going back, especially without a vaccination and given the surge of cases in recent weeks.

“I’m petrified,” said Tassie Zahner, a history teacher at Northwood High School in Silver Spring, Md. “I don’t want to get sick and die for my job.”

She emphasizes the successes of remote learning. She said some of her students are motivated to succeed, and some are not — just like in regular school. She doubts the data that finds little virus transmission inside schools.

Still, she said she would be willing to go back if she were offered a vaccine.

“I think that if you want teachers to feel safe enough to go back into the classroom, you want to reopen schools, (then) teachers need to be moved up on the list,” she said. Other teachers say a vaccine may not be enough.

Terrence Martin, president of the Detroit Federation of Teachers, said some Black educators, in particular, remain suspicious of the vaccines and fear getting inoculated. The pandemic has taken a deep toll in the Black community in Detroit and elsewhere, and there’s a long history of mistreatment by the medical establishment.

“There are folks who just don’t trust the government, don’t trust vaccination and obviously for good reason,” Martin said.

In Los Angeles, a vaccine will not allow a return to school as long as community transmission rates remain high, said Austin Beutner, superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District, which serves nearly 600,000 students.

He said it will take a long time for everybody to get vaccinated and for the vaccination to take effect. He said he also worries that even vaccinated people can spread the virus. “So, we are a long way from having students and staff in school,” he said.

At some point, he added, he expects students and employees will be required to get a coronavirus vaccine, just like they are required to take other vaccines.

“I think at the end of the day coronavirus vaccine will not be any different than those,” he said.

Las Vegas Review-Journal

Clark County schools stick to distance learning as others experiment

Author/Byline: Julie Wootton-Greener /

January 3, 2021 - 11:52 pm

While nearly all of the public schools in the Las Vegas Valley have relied entirely on distance learning since they were closed in March, most of the other nine biggest school systems in the nation have restored at least some in-person instruction.

Seven of the Big 10 have resumed classroom instruction for at least some students, Review-Journal research shows. And some — primarily in Florida — are open to any student whose family decides they would be better served by in-person interaction with an instructor.

The other districts that have stuck with the all-distance approach are the Los Angeles Unified School District and Chicago Public Schools, though the latter plans to let younger students begin returning to the classroom this month.

Something similar may be in store for CCSD, where leaders are fast approaching a tough decision about the possible reopening of valley campuses as the coronavirus continues to rage. Trustees — including three newly elected members — are slated to consider a phased-transition plan in a Jan. 14 meeting and could also set a timetable.

The plan, announced last month by the school district and the teachers union, calls for a staggered return to in-person classes, starting with preschool through third graders.

Most districts still in remote mode

In sticking with distance learning this long, Clark County — the fifth-largest school district in the nation with around 307,000 students — has been in sync with a majority of large school districts in the country, according to the [Council of the Great City Schools](#).

But the tide may be turning, according to the Washington, D.C.-based advocacy organization, which represents 76 of the nation's largest urban school districts, including CCSD. Now many more districts are looking at phased transitions similar to the one being discussed at CCSD as early as this month if health conditions allow.

At the same time, cautioned Raymond Hart, the group's research director, a number of school districts have pushed back targeted reopening dates recently to buy more time.

"I think most folks are going to take a look at where the virus cases are when they return from their holiday breaks in their local communities," Hart said.

No single approach makes sense for every district, he said, given differences in size, geography, public school funding and local COVID-19 transmission and test positivity rates.

But he observed that two primary factors — local coronavirus conditions and state expectations for what districts should be doing — often determine how different districts have handled school reopenings and closures during the pandemic.

The Long Beach Unified School District in Southern California, for example, had hoped to begin bringing its 70,000 students back for in-person classes in late January. But amid a surge in cases, it now plans to continue with distance learning until at least March 1.

How school districts are operating

Of the school districts the Council of the Great City Schools works with, about 30 — including Atlanta, San Francisco, Oakland, San Diego, Seattle, Chicago, Portland, Oregon, Anchorage, Alaska, and Albuquerque, New Mexico — operated under distance education throughout the fall semester.

Some have allowed a limited number of students, such as those with special needs, to return to campuses for in-person instruction. "By and large, it has been small numbers," Hart said.

Boston, Denver, Detroit and Indianapolis are among about 20 large school districts that were offering in-person classes at some point this fall but switched back to distance learning because of rising COVID-19 case rates. Some later resumed some in-person classes or plan to do so soon.

And about 25 districts — including New Orleans, Miami-Dade County, and Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth and Houston— are currently offering at least some in-person learning.

School districts in Florida have tried to open for as many students as possible under a state mandate to do so, Hart said. And governors in some states have threatened school districts with losing funding if they don't open up to students whose families are interested in in-person classes, Hart said.

In July, Florida Commissioner of Education Richard Corcoran issued an emergency order saying all "brick and mortar schools" had to reopen in August five days a week for all students whose families wanted them to attend in-person classes. In August, a county circuit judge said parts of the order were unconstitutional and granted a temporary injunction. But in October, a state appeals court sided with the state and schools reopened.

Conversely, Oregon required school districts to close campuses if their local county's COVID-19 metrics rose to certain levels. But Gov. Kate Brown announcing last month that schools will be allowed to offer in-person classes starting Jan. 1 and closures won't be mandated. She indicated she'd like to see a Feb. 15 target date for more students returning to campuses.

California aims for spring

California Gov. Gavin Newsom last week released a plan for schools to resume in-person teaching in the spring, starting with the youngest students and those who have struggled most with distance learning, while promising \$2 billion in state aid for coronavirus testing, personal protective equipment and increased classroom ventilation, The Associated Press reported.

Many schools are already offering in-person classes, even with surging coronavirus cases, and there have been few outbreaks, said Linda Darling-Hammond, president of the California State Board of Education and an emeritus Stanford University education professor. More than 1,730 schools have received state waivers to reopen classrooms.

The Review-Journal reached out to about a dozen large public school districts across the country to see how they have been operating during the pandemic — via distance learning or in-person classes — and what their reopening plans are. Most weren't available to comment in late December because of winter break, while others provided information but not interviews.

Here's a look at what five are doing: Los Angeles Unified School District

The nation's second-largest school district has more than 600,000 students — about twice as many as CCSD. It's been operating under distance education and doesn't have a reopening date.

In the fall, the school district provided in-person individual and small-group tutoring for students, athletic conditioning programs for student-athletes and on-campus child care for children of school-based employees and for high-needs families. But the district announced Dec. 7— the day after a regional stay-at-home order went into effect — that it was suspending in-person offerings and providing tutoring online instead.

"Because of the extraordinary high level of COVID-19 in the Los Angeles area, it is no longer safe and appropriate to have any students on campus," Superintendent Austin Beutner said in a news release last month. "We will also be asking those who are currently working at schools to work from home if at all possible for the rest of the semester."

In a Dec. 21 video message — the most recent one available — Beutner said it won't be possible to reopen school campuses by the time spring semester starts Jan. 11.

The district and the United Teachers Los Angeles union have reached an agreement on "enhancements to online instruction for students" for the next semester, Beutner said in a news release last month. That includes continuing current class assignments, an additional 30 minutes of office hours Tuesdays through Fridays, 20-30 minutes of additional live instruction for first through 12th grades on Mondays and increased employee training on social emotional learning.

The district and union agreed to a Jan. 24 deadline to complete a plan for offering hybrid instruction — a mix of in-person and remote instruction — when health conditions allow.

New York City Department of Education

The nation's largest school district, with about 1.1 million students, opened under a hybrid model when a new school year began but also offered families a distance learning option.

New York City, a coronavirus hot spot early in the pandemic, was one of the only large districts in the nation to start the new school year with some in-person classes.

All schools temporarily closed Nov. 19 and students were transitioned to full distance learning after exceeding the benchmark seven-day rolling average test positivity rate of 3 percent.

Mayor Bill de Blasio and City Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza announced a plan Nov. 29 to reopen campuses for young students and those who have a disability, about 190,000 of the district's students. Middle and high schoolers are continuing with distance education.

The plan called for students in preschool through fifth grades who had already opted for in-person learning earlier this school year to return Dec. 7. Students in all grade levels who have disabilities and attend District 75 schools were allowed to return to in-person Dec. 10.

Each school conducts random testing weekly for 20 percent of people on campus, according to a late November news release from the mayor's office. And schools are continuing to work toward being able to offer five days a week of in-person classes.

The news release also included the most recent test positivity rate in schools at the time — 0.28 percent. As of Dec. 29, the district has seen 6,867 confirmed coronavirus cases — 2,999 among students and 3,868 among employees — since mid-September.

Chicago Public Schools

The nation's third-largest school district, with about 340,000 students, operated with distance learning in the fall.

"Under this model, all instruction will happen with students attending classes from home, with the exceptions given to diverse learning students with IEPs and other specialized learning needs," according to the school district's website.

The district is planning for a phased reopening after winter break, with the option for families to send their students in preschool and "moderate and intensive cluster programs" back to classrooms in person Jan. 11 and children from kindergarten through eighth grades back Feb. 1, according to the district's website.

High school students are slated to continue with remote instruction.

Salt Lake City School District

The district, which has about 24,000 students, operated with distance learning during the fall semester.

It will offer an in-person learning option for elementary school students, with a phased return starting the week of Jan. 25. And it announced last month it has a plan to bring back middle and high school students Feb. 8, subject to School Board approval Jan. 5.

In a Dec. 18 news release, Interim Superintendent Larry Madden said the district knows it can have COVID-19 vaccines for educators and "frontline school employees" by Jan. 8 and 9. The second dose of the vaccine will be administered Jan. 29 and 30. Omaha Public Schools

This Nebraska district, which has more than 53,000 students, started its school year with distance learning but transitioned in October to a "Family 3/2" plan — a hybrid model with two cohorts alternating which days they attend in-person classes. Families in Omaha, which has nearly 480,000 residents, also have the option of full-time distance learning.

Students are in cohorts based on the first initial of their last name.

Some students in specialized programs, such as for those who have special needs, attend in person five days a week.

The second semester will start initially with distance learning, but students will return in phases this month to the same format for classes as the fall semester.

A weekly summary of COVID-19 cases for Dec. 11 — the latest information available from the school district — shows 66 new diagnosed cases among staff, 86 current active cases and 287 who are isolated or in quarantine. Among students, there were 89 new diagnosed cases, 141 active cases and 1,294 in isolation or quarantine.

Washington Post

CDC foresees spread in U.S. of highly contagious coronavirus variant

By

[Joel Achenbach](#) and [Ben Guarino](#)

Jan. 6, 2021 at 5:52 p.m. EST

The mutant variant of the novel coronavirus first seen in [Britain](#) is likely to be present in much of the United States. Although the variant has so far been detected in a very small fraction of infections, it shows signs of spreading and may become significantly more common in coming weeks, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and infectious-disease experts.

The cases have been mostly isolated: One in New York, one in Florida, one in Georgia and two in [Colorado](#). The exception has been California, and specifically San Diego County, where a robust surveillance operation has found [32 cases of the variant](#). National Institutes of Health Director Francis Collins told The Washington Post on Wednesday: “I would be surprised if that doesn’t grow pretty rapidly.”

There is no evidence that the variant, which has recently been detected in [more than 30 countries](#), carries a greater risk of severe disease or death. But the appearance of coronavirus variants, including another mutation-laden variant that has shown up in South Africa, presents a challenge for every country hoping to crush the pandemic.

A more transmissible virus could drive more patients into hospitals and boost the covid-19 death toll. It also could prolong the march toward herd immunity. That’s the point at which a pathogen circulating through a population will slam into so many people with immunity that any outbreak quickly dies out and doesn’t turn into an epidemic. The percentage of people who need to be immune for a population to achieve herd immunity is higher for more infectious pathogens.

The rise of variants also could limit the efficacy of [monoclonal antibody treatments](#) because such therapeutics are very narrowly focused and potentially could be eluded by a single mutation.

The implications for vaccines are fuzzy over the long term because the [coronavirus](#) will keep mutating. But the consensus is that the newly authorized [vaccines are likely to remain effective](#) against any variants seen so far because they elicit a broad array of neutralizing antibodies and other immune system responses. Moreover, the mRNA (messenger RNA) vaccines from Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna can be readily tweaked if necessary in response to mutations.

All of this argues for increased surveillance of the virus as it spreads through the population and collides with natural and vaccine-induced immunity. The virus is not static, and although the mutations are random, natural selection will lead to variants that are more capable of infecting and replicating in human beings. A [study](#) published last week by scientists at Imperial College London, and not yet peer-reviewed, estimated that the variant first detected in Britain is 50 percent more transmissible than the more common strain of the virus.

“Here at the CDC, we’re definitely taking this seriously, and we’re assuming for now that this variant is more transmissible,” said Greg Armstrong, the leader of the strain surveillance program at the CDC, which is still ramping up. The British variant “is probably not in every state at this point, but I think in a lot of states.”

Experts say this heightens the urgency of vaccinating as many people as possible, and some respected scientists have argued that the protocol for distributing two-dose vaccines should be altered to get more people inoculated, even if that means cutting doses in half or delaying the second dose. The Food and Drug Administration this week said it would stick with the two-shot dose backed by randomized clinical trials.

[All viruses mutate](#), and SARS-CoV-2, the novel coronavirus, doesn’t mutate quickly or in any unusual way. But with tens of millions of people infected around the world, the virus has had abundant opportunity to shape-shift randomly, and natural selection does the rest, potentially giving the virus the ability to evade natural or vaccine-induced immunity.

“We are in a race against time,” said Jennifer Nuzzo, an epidemiologist with the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security. “We need to increase our speed in which we act so that we don’t allow this virus to spread further and allow this variant to become the dominant one in circulation. The clock is ticking.”

The United States has been slow to develop the kind of genomic sequencing that has enabled Britain to closely monitor mutations in the virus and the spread of different variants. The CDC established a consortium last spring to collect data on genomic sequences and in November created the new program in strain surveillance.

Armstrong said in an interview that in the next two weeks, the agency and its contracted partners hope to more than double the number of genomic sequences posted on public websites.

“We’re not sequencing enough yet, and we need to continue to build what we’re doing,” Armstrong said.

The South African variant hasn’t been detected in the United States, he said. But the British variant may have been here [since October](#), according to preliminary data from private coronavirus tests. That data is not fully conclusive because it is not based on comprehensive genomic sequencing.

Instead, the British variant is missing a portion of the genetic code seen in the common coronavirus. By chance, the commonly used Thermo Fisher PCR test can detect that dropped gene in positive test results. Other variants that are not of concern also have that missing gene, and so it is not possible, without a full genomic sequence, to know if a dropout is actually a signal of the British variant.

But according to Armstrong, the dropout signal increased from .25 percent to .5 percent in a couple of months among the positive results detected by that PCR test. In Britain, the same pattern held — very gradual increases in the prevalence of the variant, followed by a sudden surge in which it became the dominant strain in southern England and led to a new set of lockdowns.

The variant first appeared in genomic sequences obtained by British scientists in late summer or early fall, according to the Imperial College study. But it was formally identified as a “variant of concern” in early December and was announced to the British public and the rest of the world on Dec. 14.

Armstrong said CDC officials immediately assumed it was already present in the United States because of the large volume of travel between the countries. He said the CDC anticipates it will become a rising proportion of all cases: “Assuming the data we’re seeing out of the U.K. is correct — it’s 50 percent more transmissible — over the next couple of months we’re likely to see this increase.”

There is no evidence that this variant is driving the fall/winter surge in the United States. If it were, it would have turned up in more of the genomic sequences analyzed by researchers in recent weeks.

The variant, dubbed B.1.1.7, has 17 mutations, including eight that affect the structure of the spike protein that protrudes from the surface of the virus. Although the precise consequences of each mutation are unknown, the genetic alterations appear to allow the virus to bind more easily with receptor cells in humans, resulting in a higher viral load in those infected with it.

That higher viral load may not mean a more severe illness but plausibly would lead to greater transmission as people shed more virus with every cough or sneeze. “The data are really concerning. All signs right now are pointing to the fact that this is something we should be worried about,” said Mary Kathryn Grabowski, an infectious-disease epidemiologist at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Even a seemingly modest increase in transmissibility, she said, “can mean huge, huge numbers of cases.”

The spread of the variant could potentially compel public officials to impose new restrictions or delay scheduled reopenings.

“If [the variant] starts to take over because it is more aggressive, the measures that we’ve had in place that aren’t working that great to begin with are going to be less

effective in controlling the virus,” Columbia University epidemiologist Jeffrey Shaman said.

The more contagious coronavirus variant may have had a disproportionate impact on people under 20, according to the Imperial College study. This may have had a societal cause — it was observed when schools were open but the rest of the country was under lockdown — rather than a biological one, the study authors said.

The study authors analyzed genomic and epidemiological data collected in Britain from early November into December. By measuring what’s called the reproduction number — the tally of other people infected by an individual with the virus — the scientists concluded that the variant has a “substantial transmission advantage” compared with other strains.

In the United States, schools superintendents and boards of education are monitoring infection rates in their communities involving the new covid-19 strain, said Michael Casserly, the executive director of the **Council for the Great City Schools**, a nonprofit organization that represents the largest urban school districts in the country.

“The exact opening dates in many of our big-city school districts continue to be fluid as our superintendents and boards monitor infection rates in their communities from this new strain of covid,” he said.

Bob Runcie, the superintendent of Broward County Public Schools in Florida, said school resumed Monday for any student who wanted to attend in person.

“Given the data that we have, and the consultation we’ve had with public health officials and medical experts, our school sites are not places of significant transmission of the coronavirus, and so our schools are relatively safe,” Runcie said.

Washington Post

Biden, aiming to reopen schools, set to request infusion of cash

By

[Laura Meckler](#)

Jan. 14, 2021 at 1:04 p.m. EST

President-elect Joe Biden will ask Congress for \$130 billion to help K-12 schools reopen, plus billions more to implement rapid [coronavirus](#) testing in schools, a far more aggressive response than anything lawmakers have approved to date.

Another plank of Biden's proposal, announced Thursday, aims to mount a national vaccination plan that could facilitate school reopening as well, with vaccinated teachers more willing to return to classrooms.

The proposals are part of a \$1.9 trillion "rescue plan" that also includes \$1,400 stimulus checks to most households and other aid to state and local governments, transition officials said. A senior official called it a "bold and historic emergency package to change the course of the pandemic."

For schools, Biden says his goal is to have a majority open for in-person classes within 100 days of his inauguration. It's unclear how he will measure success, and some research suggests the nation may have achieved his goal.

The Trump administration has not kept track of how many schools or school districts are open for in-person classes, and a transition spokesman said the new administration will work to improve data collection.

Biden reiterated Thursday that he would do everything he could to safely reopen "a majority of our K through 8 schools" by the end of his first 100 days.

"We can do this if we give the school districts — the schools themselves, the communities, the states — the clear guidance they need as well as the resources they need that they can't afford right now," he said.

Biden hopes to achieve his goal with the help of a hefty federal aid package. At \$130 billion, the K-12 schools piece of his proposal is more than twice the \$64 billion provided to date over two previous relief packages. School advocates have complained that the dollars allocated so far fall far short of the need.

The K-12 funding is meant to address a wide range of needs. That includes expenses associated with mitigating virus spread inside buildings, such as improving ventilation systems, buying personal protective equipment and ensuring schools have nurses. It

also addresses expenses associated with social distancing inside schools — reducing class sizes, modifying spaces and increasing the number of buses.

The package includes funding for mental health support for students and tutoring or summer school to help recover lost time in the classroom and learning. The money also could be used by states to prevent cuts to pre-K programs.

A portion of the funding would be reserved for an “educational equity challenge grant.” Details are not yet clear, but this suggests the Biden administration will try to use the new funding to advance equity goals, perhaps the way the Obama administration used stimulus funding in 2009 to advance its education change goals.

“It is absolutely imperative to have a package that focuses on both rescue and recovery,” said Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers. “I’m glad that the president-elect is putting forward a comprehensive package and someone is acting like a president.”

The outline of the package released Thursday did not specify how prescriptive Biden would like the funding to be. Under President Trump, states and school districts were given wide latitude in how they used federal aid.

The rescue package includes \$35 billion in aid to public colleges and universities and to public and private historically Black colleges and universities as well as other minority-serving institutions. There does not appear to be dedicated funding for other private universities.

The plan arrived the same day the Education Department [made \\$21.2 billion in stimulus funding](#) available for colleges and universities to shore up their operations and support students through the pandemic. The latest round of congressional funding was met with disappointment from higher-education groups who pleaded with lawmakers for at least \$120 billion in support.

Biden’s package also includes \$50 billion to ramp up coronavirus testing nationally, including in schools. The hope is that by regularly testing students and educators, asymptomatic carriers of the virus can be identified early. A system of random testing is in place in New York City schools, but not many other districts have implemented that sort of system.

In addition, once Biden takes office, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is expected to issue a new set of guidelines for schools that better helps administrators safely operate in-person classes. For instance, districts have been asking for guidance on quarantining — who needs to quarantine after an exposure to someone who tests positive, and for how long.

Another key to reopening will be getting vaccinations to teachers, and Biden put mounting a national vaccination plan at the center of his rescue plan. The CDC has

recommended that states include educators in the second-highest priority group, but the vaccine rollout has been inconsistent across the country.

“The one thing that’s going to help teachers more than anything is getting this vaccine out,” said Michael Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research at the University of Minnesota and a member of Biden’s covid-19 advisory board. Biden has said his goal is to open a majority of schools within 100 days of taking office, but several experts in education policy said they had no idea how the incoming administration plans to measure that.

Some researchers have studied samples of districts, but no one has a definitive national picture of how many schools are open today. With school districts open throughout Texas and Florida and in many other communities, it’s possible the goal has been reached.

Khalilah Harris, managing director for K-12 education policy at the Center for American Progress, a liberal think tank, said Biden’s call was more of “a values statement” than an explicit measurement.

“I think it is a good goal, but I do not know how they plan to measure or track it,” said Michael Casserly, executive director of the [Council of the Great City Schools](#), which represents urban school systems.

A transition spokesman said the federal government does not have tools to measure school reopenings and said the incoming administration is “working to enhance the federal government’s ability to effectively capture this data and assess progress toward safely reopening America’s schools.”

On Thursday, Biden clarified that his goal is limited to K-8 schools. Younger students have more trouble with remote learning and also are less likely to become infected with the coronavirus. It’s likely that hybrid systems, where students learn part-time from home and part-time from school, probably would count as open, said people familiar with the transition planning.

[*Vaccines, dollars and Biden ratchet up pressure on teachers to return to school*](#)

With the virus surging, it appears that districts are moving in the opposite direction. Many that were open have closed, according to a new analysis from the Center on Reinventing Public Education, which tracks a national sample of 477 school districts.

It found that in early November, 21 percent of school districts were operating fully remotely. By December, that had risen to 32 percent. Still, the center’s data suggest three-quarters of districts had some form of in-person learning — well over a majority.

The Council of the Great City Schools keeps a tally of its members and found 18 districts closed after having reopened this fall. Another 28 school systems are open now, the

group said, including Chicago Public Schools, which opened this week even as many teachers refused to return to their classrooms, citing safety concerns.

Erica Werner and Danielle Douglas-Gabriel contributed to this report.

CAPITOL ATTACK

Washington Post

Education, civil rights groups blast Trump for inciting violence



A mob stormed the U.S. Capitol on Wednesday, surrounding statues and scaffoldings set up for the inauguration of President-elect Joseph Biden. (Astrid Riecken for The Washington Post)



By

[Valerie Strauss](#)

Jan. 7, 2021 at 11:28 a.m. EST

Education and civil rights groups are condemning President Trump for inciting the mob that invaded the U.S. Capitol on Wednesday, and some are calling for his removal from office.

Council of the Great City Schools, a nonprofit group that represents dozens of the largest school districts in the country — from chief executive Michael Casserly

School leaders, teachers, and educators from the nation's urban public schools condemn the actions of the violent rioters who stormed and desecrated the Capitol at the encouragement of our president and his enablers. Make no mistake — this was not only an attack on the Capitol building, but on democracy itself. Citizens of the world are watching this display of lawlessness with shock and horror as the world's beacon of civility — the shining “city upon a hill” — is reduced to a crime scene. Public school educators everywhere teach our children to respect our leaders, our institutions, and the process by which we as a nation choose our representatives, and we weep now at the loss of innocence and trust these events have wrought. Defiling our capitol and disrupting the work of the people's House and Senate in an effort to overturn a free and fair election is a betrayal of our founding principles. Unfortunately, we are in this position because our president has lied repeatedly to the American public about who won this election and has promoted the treasonous notion that people should take matters into their own hands in attempting what is nothing short of insurrection.

As we struggle to help our children understand how this happened and what it means, we should be clear about our collective outrage and our commitment to restoring peace and democracy in the months and years to come. Our students have lost so much over the past year, and now they must reconcile what they have been taught about the ideals of our democratic nation with the criminal attacks they are witnessing unfold in our capitol. The process of rebuilding and healing our country is now the great challenge of our lifetimes, and the nation's public-school educators welcome our responsibility and charge to work toward a brighter future on behalf of our students and our country.

AASA, The School Superintendents Association — from executive director Dan Domenech

Yesterday families across America watched in horror the images that flashed across their television screens generated by the assault on one of our nation's most hallowed grounds.

The herculean efforts being done by school district administrators, building leaders, teachers and parents to educate our young learners regarding what's right and what's wrong was indirectly challenged following the senseless acts of vandalism at the Capitol building.

With the holiday season in our rearview mirror and the new year just a week old, the question before our school system leaders is ‘How do we move forward, while at the same time, grapple with the ongoing public health crisis?’

NAACP — from President Derrick Johnson

What we are witnessing at this moment is the manifestation and culmination of reckless leadership, a pervasive misuse of power, and anarchy. This is not protesting or activism; this is an insurrection, an assault on our democracy, and a coup incited by President Trump.

For the past four years, we've seen him chip away at the civility, integrity, and dignity of our nation. The pattern of President Trump's misconduct is unmistakable and has proven time and time again that it is a grave threat and harm to the fragile fabric of our country. In the latest show of failed leadership, we witnessed the Capitol under siege by bad actors who had no other objective than to disrupt the constitutional proceedings of a fair and rightful transition of power. At this moment, President Trump is silent and continues to perpetuate lies and disinformation for his selfish amusement and personal gain.

We must not allow President Trump to continue to place our nation in peril. The NAACP calls for President Trump's impeachment so that he will never again be able to harm our beloved country, and more importantly, its people.

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education — from president and chief executive Lynn M. Gangone

Our nation experienced a serious threat to our treasured democracy as rioters stormed one of our nation's sacred buildings, the U.S. Capitol, intending damage and insurrection. We witnessed a challenge to our democracy that none of us could ever have imagined. Generated by our nation's President, some Members of Congress, and their denial of the results of our free and open electoral process, this unlawful invasion of the Capitol has left us all stunned. Never could we imagine such an event would occur in our nation's capital, the seat of our democracy.

We are further outraged by the vast difference in how these rioters were treated by police as compared to how peaceful protesters for Black Lives Matter have been treated. The discrepancies are stark and maddening.

As educators, we hold our responsibility to instill the values of democracy in our students as a core mission. We reinforce the will of the people by honoring the outcome of elections. We believe in equal opportunity and fairness for all citizens, and we name violations when we see them.

The denigration of our democracy we experienced was fueled by incendiary rhetoric and unfounded allegations. We will not allow them to stand. Today, we renew our commitment to resisting hate and restoring hope, to our compact with Americans to promote the common good, to ensure equity, and to bring forth the American spirit that is the foundation of our nation.

AACTE joins with like-minded citizens around the country who are determined to preserve our democracy and ensure the continuation of free and fair elections. Together, we will rise above the recklessness of these actions and focus on the peaceful transition of power to President-elect Joe Biden and Vice-President elect Kamala Harris on January 20. We join our education colleagues in working tirelessly to ensure an inclusive, equitable and just society.

Collaborative of nine leading racial equity organization: Advancement Project National Office, Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum,

Demos, Faith in Action, NAACP, National Congress of American Indians, National Urban League, Race Forward, and Unidos US.

WASHINGTON - The vigilantism and attacks in Washington, DC yesterday are nothing short of treason. They are part and parcel of the arc of violence enshrined in the modus operandi of white supremacy and white nationalism. These terrorist and seditious actions have been fomented by President Trump. Throughout his Presidency, Trump, and members of the GOP, have fueled up racism, xenophobia, and antisemitism — and Trump has continually encouraged his supporters to bear arms and riot.

President Trump advised the Proud Boys, a known white supremacist terrorist organization, to “stand back and stand by.” They listened. Yesterday’s events are therefore no surprise. This attack on our country was years in the making.

Further, President Trump is simultaneously inciting violence through his calls to his supporters while asking for the support of law enforcement and Capitol Police and delaying the deployment of the National Guard. The difference in the state’s use of force on these seditionists versus the violent and unlawful use of force against peaceful protestors for Black lives or those working to preserve their health care access is abhorrent, and yet another stark example of racial inequity. The ability of those who stormed the Capitol yesterday to comfortably take seats in the building and take selfies with Capitol Police without fear of arrest or assault is the height of white privilege.

We cannot state this more clearly: Law enforcement officers allowed armed white vigilantes to take a federal building by force. This is the epitome of racist hypocrisy. This attempted coup did not succeed, and these actions are simply an unacceptable intrusion into our democracy. Voters elected Joe Biden and Kamala Harris and despite the seditious acts of Trump supporters, Congress confirmed the election of President-Elect Joe Biden and Vice President-Elect Kamala Harris. Those who aim to obstruct the most basic element of American government — the peaceful transition of power — must be held accountable.

Yesterday’s events followed the calls of the two Senate runoffs in Georgia which secured Democratic control of the US Senate. The victories in Georgia, as many earlier in November, build on the pivotal organizing work in communities of color, throughout a prolonged and contested election cycle. Black, Latino, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islanders, American Indian and Alaska Native communities led us to historic voter turnout and participation in our democratic process. The American people voted for President Elect Biden and Vice President Elect Harris to lead our nation for the next four years. States have been through recounts, audits, and litigation — all of which have certified their results. There is no question that this election was properly administered. We look forward to the Biden/Harris administration taking office and centering racial justice and racial equity, as the soul of our nation hangs in the balance. We are confident that the goodwill of the American public and our enduring spirit of democracy will prevail.

Council of Chief State School Officers -- from chief executive officer Carissa Moffat Miller

The peaceful transition of power is a pillar of the American democracy that has been an example to the world for more than 200 years. The assault on the U.S. Capitol today was abhorrent and violated every norm of American governance.

As educators, we take seriously our responsibility to prepare young people for civic life and to be models of peaceful participants in a democratic society that serves all people.

What we witnessed at the Capitol today was the antithesis of that ideal.

Our democracy is one of the most precious legacies we leave our children. We must protect it.

COUNCIL REPORTS AND REVIEWS

POLITICO

Weekly Education

Coronavirus Special Edition

Editor's Note: Welcome to Weekly Education: Coronavirus special edition. Each week, we will explore how the pandemic is reshaping and upending education as we know it across the country, from pre-K through grad school. We will explore the debates of the day, new challenges and talk to movers and shakers about whether changes ushered in now are here to stay.

EDUCATION POLICY WISH LISTS FOR THE NEW

ADMINISTRATION — As the Biden transition kicks into full gear in the coming weeks, the policy wish lists from various groups are piling up. Many have comprehensive agendas for both the incoming administration and new Congress.

Some of the recommendations for executive action from groups likely to have the Biden administration's ear when it comes to crafting education policy:

— **Prosecute for-profit college executives.** Student Defense, an advocacy group, proposes the Biden Education Department more robustly use its existing legal powers to make the owners and executives of for-profit colleges personally liable for the misconduct of their institutions. Sen. [Elizabeth Warren](#) (D-Mass.) is among the Democrats who endorse the plan.

— **Cancel student loan debt.** Biden faces growing pressure from progressives to provide at least \$10,000 of loan forgiveness for each borrower. He endorsed the idea on the campaign trail but hasn't said whether he would pursue debt cancellation through legislation or

unilaterally. The Student Borrower Protection Center and Dēmos compiled a [policy playbook](#) that charts a path for Biden to cancel student loan debt through executive action, using existing laws.

— **Issue guidance on school desegregation.** [The Education Trust](#) [says](#) the next administration should help schools legally pursue desegregation. The group also wants the Education Department to revive the “supplement not supplant” rule for Title I funding the Obama administration started but [dropped during its final days in office](#).

— **Nominate a higher education-focused secretary.** Higher Learning Advocates, a bipartisan policy organization, and other groups, are [urging Biden to pick an Education secretary](#) “who holds both classroom experience and higher education experience” — a role that’s often been held by someone with more K-12 education focus.

— **Restore a "welcoming environment for international students."** NAFSA: Association of International Educators has a [playbook](#) for how the Biden administration should reverse what it called the “severe damage to this country’s reputation as the premier destination for international students and scholars” caused by the Trump administration and the pandemic. Among the recommendations: reversing immigration policies that tightened the rules on student visas, rolling back travel bans, restoring DACA protections and establishing a coordinated U.S. strategy for recruiting talented students.

— **End “politically motivated” investigations into colleges.** Colleges and university groups want the Biden administration to end a slew of investigations opened by the Trump administration that they view as politically motivated. That includes a recent inquiry into Princeton over its admission that there is “systematic racism” embedded at the school. The [American Council on Education](#) and the [Association of Public and Land-grant Universities](#) are also calling on Biden to scale back DeVos’ crackdown on foreign funding in higher

education, including the dozen investigations opened over universities' reporting of the money.

— **Prioritize school employees, students and families for Covid-19 vaccines.** [The Council of the Great City Schools](#) is also calling on Biden to appoint a big-city school superintendent to the White House Coronavirus Task Force and better coordinate the distribution of Covid-19 protective and testing equipment to schools.

— **Postpone standardized testing during the pandemic.** “Suspend federal testing requirements until after the Covid-19 crisis has passed,” the National Education Association policy playbook [recommends](#). Civil rights groups and some congressional Democrats, however, say the testing requirements should remain.

— **Boost accountability policies in higher ed.** A [coalition of groups](#) called for the Biden administration to expand protections for students and student veterans from “shoddy higher education programs” they said DeVos “systematically dismantled.” They’re also calling on the Biden administration to reverse DeVos efforts to ease state oversight of college programs and federal accreditation requirements.

Politico

November 23, 2020

— **The COVID Collaborative, Council of Chief State School Officers, Council of the Great City Schools and the National Governors Association** are out with a new [report](#), endorsed by a handful of former Education secretaries, on how to improve online learning.

Tampa Bay Times

Spending cuts in Hillsborough schools warranted, report says

The school district had 3,000 excess employees and transferred \$200 million to meet expenses, the report shows.

By **Marlene Sokol**

Published December 3, 2020

TAMPA — For years the Hillsborough County School District has been living beyond its means — to the tune of 3,000 excess jobs, and nearly \$200 million in transfers from a capital fund to cover losses.

These are among the findings in [a professional report](#) that largely validated the actions Superintendent Addison Davis has taken since he took over the large district in March — actions so unpopular, they inspired public protests and loud derision on the district’s social media.

A team from the **Council of the Great City Schools**, a membership organization of large school districts, says the job cuts were necessary — and that the district should do even more to align spending with resources.

“Past administrations allowed structural imbalances in the district’s general operating fund by failing to adjust spending for losses in revenue and increases in costs, and using one-time monies to cover resulting shortfalls,” the consultants wrote.

They noted that principals in Hillsborough are able to fill jobs that have no funding, and grant-funded projects continue after the grants run out. Duplication runs rampant, they wrote. They were told, “the district had 126 different programs aimed at curtailing bullying.”

Just as Jeff Eakins inherited a budget mess when he became superintendent in 2015, Davis was taken aback at the problems he encountered this summer.

At one point, it appeared the district’s main reserve account had shrunk by \$50 million since the previous year. The district made some adjustments and wound up with only a \$32 million loss.

But to protect that reserve, the district transferred \$40 million from its capital fund into the general fund, which covers ongoing expenses such as payroll. As chief financial officer Gretchen Saunders explained, such transfers are allowable because some of the general fund money supported capital projects. But such transfers, since 2014, have added up to \$197 million.

Davis enlisted the council in September to perform the study. Even before the project began, he and deputy superintendent Michael Kemp developed a staffing matrix and, school by school, looked for positions that were not supported by student enrollment and funding, and could therefore be cut.

Pushback followed from teacher and parent groups, and from the teachers' union. The district wound up cutting roughly 800 district and school-based jobs. In more than half of those cases, the jobs were already unfilled. Other affected employees found positions through the district's hiring pool. This was the first of three phases; more cuts are planned in the first and second semesters of the 2021-22 school year.

Stephanie Baxter-Jenkins, executive director of the teachers' union, said she is not surprised that the Great City Schools report supported Davis' actions. She said it was "a surface-level look at things and not a deep dive," clearly based on conversations with Davis and his executive team. Although she believed the report raised some valid points, it also stated, incorrectly, that it is unclear how spending is related to the district's equity goals. In fact, Eakins' administration went to great lengths to assign extra resources to those schools that needed them the most, based on risk factors among their students.

Baxter-Jenkins said she believes the staffing matrix used by Davis and Kemp goes too far.

"I'm very worried about staffing, the amount of burnout I'm seeing among teachers, and what they are having to handle," she said. "I think right now we keep putting more on people, and they're ready to throw their hands up. You don't want to over-budget or over-staff, I get that, for money purposes. But understaffing so much brings a whole different set of problems."

And she said she wished that, in its budgeting process, the district would assume it will give teachers a yearly raise.

The council commended Davis for what it termed a "soft landing" financial recovery plan. The goal is to accomplish as much as possible through natural attrition, transfers of qualified staff, and by eliminating vacant positions.

One problem: The way the district maintains its records, there are sometimes positions that have no funding. The report described one hiring freeze in which district leaders learned that of 1,129 vacant positions, only 424 were funded in the budget.

Other times, they wrote, "the budgets for specific positions are created only after the position is filled, and the incumbent is paid by the payroll system."

The district's credit has suffered, largely because of losses to the reserve account. Now down to \$118.2 million, the reserve represents 3.9 percent of general fund expenditures, which is just slightly above the state minimum of 3 percent and below a 5 percent threshold that the School Board enacted after the 2015 crisis.

The report also noted the volatility of school finances in the current pandemic. In September, the district reported a year-to-year loss of 7,300 students. That loss was adjusted to 5,600 later in the month. “While this is an improvement,” the authors wrote, “it illustrates the elusiveness of predictions in the current environment.”

Other practices came under scrutiny as well. The district pays millions to a substitute staffing service, when it could use some of its overstaffed employees to fill vacancies. There are not enough controls on district purchasing cards. And, the way financial reports are written, it is not easy for the administration or School Board to spot troubling trends.

Tampa Bay Times

Hillsborough schools' budget setbacks prompt worry, and a Zoom call

Community leaders express concern as the district's reserves continue to decline.

By **Marlene Sokol**

Published Dec. 18

TAMPA — Lawmakers in Hillsborough County and beyond are expressing concerns about financial problems in the Hillsborough County School District, and possible consequences from the state.

While there is no evidence that the state plans to take any action, a conversation between two lawmakers appears to have prompted a Zoom meeting on Tuesday with more than a dozen participants.

Some were lawmakers, others were community leaders. The word “receivership” was uttered. “Everybody is committed to making sure it doesn’t happen,” said Rep. Andrew Learned, a Democrat who listened in on part of the call.

Education advocate Damaris Allen was on the call too. “The word receivership hasn’t been tossed around previously,” she said. “That’s what caught my attention.”

State officials have not described any plans for the school district to enter receivership, a legal tool where control of an insolvent organization is given to another party, a “receiver.” District leaders say they are working collaboratively with the state to stabilize their budget of more than \$3 billion.

But, according to an email that superintendent Addison Davis sent the School Board after hearing about the Zoom meeting, the outlook right now isn’t good.

School districts, he wrote, are required to alert the state if their reserve balance falls below 2 percent at the end of the calendar year. State law requires a reserve of 3 percent of yearly operating revenues.

Hillsborough, Davis wrote, had to send such a letter. He added that the district is on course to show a negative balance in its reserves at the end of May and a \$120 million decline in the fund from the previous year at the end of June.

A School Board workshop is planned Jan. 12. At that time, Davis wrote, he will present a corrective action plan, as the state requires.

Since summer, Davis and his team have been sounding alarms that the district must rein in spending. A study by the **Council of the Great City Schools** confirmed Hillsborough Schools cannot support its current workforce of more than 24,000 without deficit spending. To protect its main reserve, the district transfers money yearly from a capital account. A bridge loan of \$75 million enabled the district to meet payroll in recent weeks.

Hillsborough's predicament came up at a meeting of the Florida Senate's Subcommittee on Appropriations for Education, of which Pensacola Republican Doug Broxson is chair.

Broxson said that as a courtesy, he placed a call to Sen. Janet Cruz, a Democrat in Tampa. "I said, this is in your backyard," Broxson recalled telling Cruz. "You can dig into it and see what's going on."

The Zoom meeting came together, and speculation spread throughout the week.

Neither Cruz nor Davis were available to comment on Friday. Davis, called away for a family emergency, did manage to have a phone conversation with Learned. The newly elected Brandon representative was reassured by Davis' response to the financial situation. "He seems to have his hands around it," Learned said.

District spokeswoman Tanya Arja blamed a number of factors for the reserve loss: decreased student enrollment, costs associated with the pandemic, and a drop in tax collections.

"We will work with the board in January to discuss strategies and receive the board's direction as we move forward with the state, and to ensure Hillsborough County Public Schools maintains a fiscally stable organization" Arja said.

Chalkbeat Philadelphia

By Dale Mezzacappa Dec 10, 2020, 10:04pm EST

The Philadelphia Board of Education is embarking on an ambitious effort to reframe its stewardship of the school district around improving student achievement, outlining a strategy that will require big changes in the way it has traditionally done business.

Superintendent William Hite called it a “game changer.”

“It’s time to move beyond ‘system survival’ mode and to focus on the success of all our students,” Joyce Wilkerson, board president, said in unveiling the [five-year strategic plan](#). The plan, she said, is the board’s effort to “deliver on the promise of local control, and it starts with the most basic question, ‘Why do our schools exist?’ They exist to provide every student with the tools and experiences they need to be successful.”

Board members said they spent two years on this project, consulting with the [Council of Great City Schools](#) and talking to their peers across the country. They also held town hall meetings with parents, teachers, and community members locally.

Part of that time was spent comparing Philadelphia’s test scores to other cities’ on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, also known as the “nation’s report card,” or NAEP. The test is given to a sample of students across the country and is widely viewed as one of the best benchmarks of student learning. It has no high stakes.

The bottom line for Philadelphia: When measured by national tests, the district scores far worse compared to other large urban districts with a large number of low-income students. Fewer than 20% of the city’s fourth and eighth graders met national benchmarks in math and reading on the last NAEP test, which was administered in 2019. That performance put Philadelphia – the nation’s poorest big city – behind 16 other districts in fourth-grade math and eighth-grade reading and math. In fourth-grade math, it was behind 19 other districts.

“Philadelphia is not keeping up with our peers,” Wilkerson said. “It’s sobering. It shows that as a whole, we are not doing what we need to for our students.”

She added: “We know it’s possible,” based on what other cities have achieved and the pockets of individual school successes in Philadelphia.

Calling their new direction “[goals and guardrails](#),” board members plan to focus on making sure all students stay on grade level throughout their school careers and graduate high school with the “tools and experiences they need to succeed in the global economy.”

“I’m not sure whether those who are listening realize how this is a paradigm shift,” said board member Angela McIver.

The guardrails set “non-negotiable” conditions for schools, including a welcoming environment, access to “well rounded” experiences for all students, including arts and athletics, robust partnerships with students’ families, and addressing systemic racism.

It is both “obvious and revolutionary...to focus on student achievement,” said board member Lee Huang.

The school board resumed control of the district in April 2018 after nearly two decades under the state-dominated School Reform Commission, an era that Wilkerson – who served briefly as the SRC chair – said paid little attention to student achievement, focusing instead on management tasks, such as approving vendor contracts.

“In one evaluation, the **Council of Great City Schools** estimates that the SRC spent just 10% of the time talking about student learning,” she said. “Let’s focus less on who gets what contract and more on the big picture.”

Even so, some progress was made in the reform commission era, she said. Based on state tests, more schools moved into the high-performing category and many moved out of the lowest performing category. The graduation rate went up.

Board meetings will look different from now on, with more public engagement and discussion of data, members said. There will be monthly monitoring in public, using data. The vision will guide board self assessments and the annual evaluation of the superintendent.

The first specific goal is to grow the percentage of third through eighth graders who read on grade level according to state tests from 35.7% to 65% by 2026. The board will also compare the academic performance of different subgroups of students, including the economically disadvantaged, racial and ethnic categories, English learners and special education students.

“Systemic racism is alive in our district,” Wilkerson said in a briefing for reporters on Wednesday.. “We’ll be tracking suspension data carefully,” she said. “We’re taking a look at everything in the curriculum...retooling the way we spend money and developing more effective academic programs and getting more out of the resources we have.”

The project is beginning in a time of crisis, when the district is looking at looming funding shortfalls due to the pandemic and still trying to determine how virtual schooling has further damaged students academically.

But Wilkerson and other board members said this is the right time to change direction.

“It’s essential to do this at this moment,” said Mallory Fix-Lopez.

Hite agreed. “It does provide us with a focused effort around student outcomes,” he said. “This changes how we look at data...and changes the types of questions we should be asking.”

Board member Julia Danzy said that this may be unsettling to teachers and others who work in the district. She said she understands that people are working hard and trying their best. But doing that and not getting the desired results “causes burnout,” she said. “Our actions are not indictments against you but a critical examination of the system.”

The board faces many obstacles trying to bring about dramatic change: It does not control its sources of revenue – it is dependent entirely on the city and state for funding — and, unlike other school boards in Pennsylvania, it has no taxing authority.

The teachers' contract also dictates how teachers are assigned to schools. Fix-Lopez said that one issue they know affects student learning is class size, but changing the way teachers are allotted to direct more to the neediest schools would require agreement from the union.

At the board meeting, some members of the public were skeptical about the plan and urged stronger actions.

Community member Horace Clouden said the board should replace Hite, crack down on what he said was poor teacher attendance, and dismiss principals whose schools are underachieving. "Start firing people and not relocating them," he said.

Cheri Micheau, who used to work in the district with English language learners and students who have immigrated, said she is not confident their concerns will be fully addressed, especially regarding their access to special admission schools.

"These failures are to be sure examples of racism, ethnic discrimination and linguicism. I urge you to mention these students specifically in this document since they are members of yet another group disadvantaged in their daily educational experiences in Philadelphia schools."

Parent Stephanie King said the board has a long way to go to rebuild trust with the community.

"The goals are aspirational, the guardrails would be a welcoming environment to achieve those goals," King said. "And I am here to tell you that you cannot achieve any of those things unless you repair the trust and relationship with the people in the schools. The students, the parents, and the teachers. You say you want every student at grade level for math and reading, but you refuse to listen when teachers tell you what they need."

Mayor James Kenney is in the process of naming three new members to the nine-member board. Activist groups want more input into the process. Two members, Chris McGinley and Ameen Akbar, resigned earlier this year. Huang announced his intention to step down as soon as a replacement is seated.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Dallas Morning News

Longtime Dallas schools leader receives top honor for being a ‘champion’ for urban education

Michael Hinojosa, Dallas ISD’s superintendent, was named the Green-Garner Award winner this week by the Council of the Great City Schools

By Corbett Smith

6:56 PM on Oct 16, 2020 CDT

Dallas ISD superintendent Michael Hinojosa has been named as the 2020 Urban Educator of the Year by the Council of the Great City Schools.

Hinojosa, 64, was presented the award this week in a virtual ceremony during the Council’s 64th annual fall conference. He was the lone finalist for the honor, also known as the Green-Garner Award.

“Michael Hinojosa has been a true champion for urban education and his passion for equity and excellence has had a profound effect on how all of us advocate for our urban students,” said **Council Executive Director Michael Casserly** in a statement. “Over his 41-year career, his dedication and humility have made a difference in the lives of the students he serves and there could be no one more deserving of this award.”

Hinojosa said the honor was especially meaningful coming from an organization like the Council of the Great City Schools, which focuses its lens on 76 of the nation’s largest urban school districts.

“I believe in the mission of urban public education,” he said. “It’s one of the hardest things to do in this business.”

As part of the award, Hinojosa will receive a \$10,000 college scholarship to present to a Dallas ISD student.

Hinojosa, a Sunset High School graduate, started working in education in Dallas in 1979, hired as a teacher at Stockard Middle School. In his second stint as Dallas' superintendent, Hinojosa has shepherded the district through a stretch of rapid improvement, as DISD cut its number of underperforming campuses from 43 to the single digits. He also helped steer passage of its \$1.6 billion bond in 2015, as well as getting approval from voters on a tax-ratification election.

BERNARD HARRIS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

2021 CGCS-Bernard Harris Math and Science 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>



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

COUNCIL OF THE GREAT CITY SCHOOLS

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Toledo
Tulsa
Washoe County
Wichita

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

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.

PROGRAM GUIDELINES

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).**

CGCS-Bernard Harris Math and Science Scholarships

2021 Partners



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



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

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.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social Media Report

Tracking The Council's Social Presence

Annual Report
Analysis of 2020



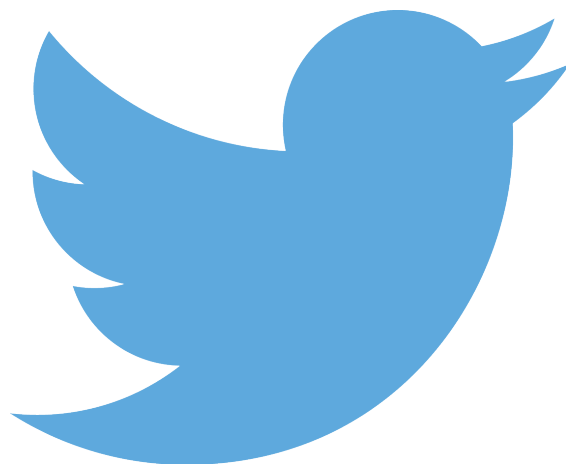
Twitter Goals

The Council's Twitter monthly goals for the 2020 calendar year were created after analyzing data from the end of 2019 and reviewing what the organization wanted and needed from social media.

Five goals were set as both ambitious and attainable parameters. The monthly goals were based on:

- Impressions; earn 45,000 impressions (measures the total number of views of tweets)
- Engagement; average 2 link clicks per day
- 40 Retweets
- 100 likes
- Followers; gain 40 new followers a month

The following is a month-to-month summary that includes data, statistics, and a short description of notable information for that month.



Twitter Results

January

- 18 posts
- 33,200 impressions
- 48 link clicks/averaged 2 per day
- 41 retweets
- 7 new followers
- 95 Likes/averaged 3 likes per day

Announcement of CGCS-Bernard Harris Scholarship and Legislative/Policy Conference.

February

- 8 posts
- 25,200 impressions
- 34 link clicks/averaged 1 per day
- 17 retweets
- 13 new followers
- 45 likes/averaged 2 per day

We trained the Communications Intern on how to manage the Council's social media.

March

- 20 posts
- 32,000 impressions
- 95 link clicks/averaged 3 per day
- 35 retweets
- 29 new followers
- 44 likes/averaged 1 per day

Transitioned to remote work due to COVID-19. Letter to Congress and Senate did well.

Twitter Results

April

- 14 posts
- 64,100 impressions
- 299 link clicks/averaged 10 per day
- 61 retweets
- 75 likes/averaged 3 likes per day
- 114 new followers

Highlighted statistics from the letter to Congress press release.

May

- 13 posts
- 37,00 impressions
- 99 link clicks/averaged 3 per day
- 19 retweets
- 39 likes/averaged 1 like per day
- 50 new followers

BIRE meeting rescheduled due to COVID-19, but May edition of the *Urban Educator* did well!

June

- 19 posts
- 33,400 impressions
- 205 link clicks/averaged 7 per day
- 47 retweets
- 110 likes/averaged 4 per day
- 30 new followers

CGCS-Bernard Harris Scholarship winners announced and statement on George Floyd killing released.

Twitter Results

July

- 13 posts
- 22,100 impressions
- 203 link clicks/averaged 7 per day
- 17 retweets
- 68 likes/averaged 2 per day
- 45 new followers

Highlighted stories of outstanding graduates and Council files Amicus Brief against Department of Education.

August

- 10 posts
- 17,100 impressions
- 38 link clicks/averaged 1 per day
- 11 retweets
- 40 likes/averaged 1 like per day
- 26 new followers

Announcement of Annual Fall Conference going virtual and the release of the ELL report "Returning to School."

September

- 12 posts
- 25,500 impressions
- 76 link clicks/averaged 3 per day
- 35 retweets
- 193 likes/averaged 6 per day
- 61 new followers

Green-Garner award finalists announced.

Twitter Results

October

- 23 posts
- 60,700 impressions
- 42 link clicks/averaged 1 per day
- 45 retweets/ averaged 2 per day
- 403 likes
- 88 new followers

#CGCS20 (Fall Conference) boosted Twitter engagement, and a conference social media toolkit was created.

November

- 10 posts
- 23,300 impressions
- 58 link clicks/averaged 2 per day
- 9 retweets
- 36 likes/averaged 1 per day
- 60 new followers

BIRE meeting and Council offers recommendations for the President-Elect Biden Education transition team.

December

- 3 posts
- 12,800 impressions
- 13 link clicks/averaged 0 per day
- 6 retweets
- 18 likes/averaged 1 per day
- 18 new followers

Holidayseason affected stats for this month.

Other Social Media

Though used at a lesser consistency than Twitter, the Council does publish content through other social media outlets. These include Facebook, LinkedIn, Vimeo, and YouTube.

In 2021, goals and data analysis will be conducted for the Council's Facebook page on a consistent basis. The Council also plans to increase the output of video content and look into creating another social media channel (Instagram).



YouTube

2020 Highlights

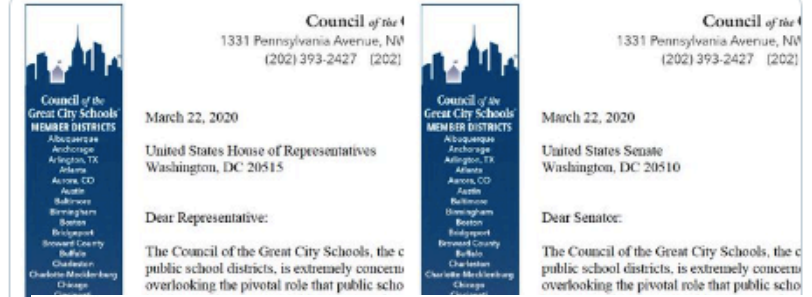
Here are only a few of the many amazing tweets and mentions of 2020!



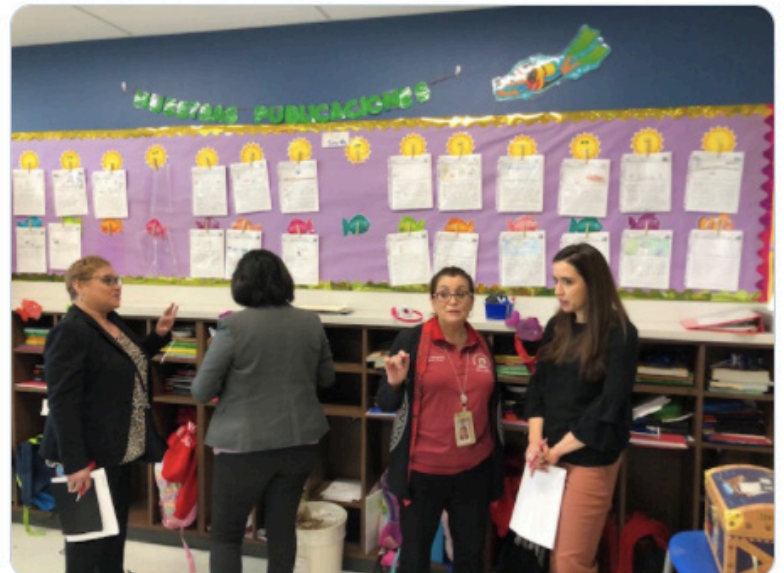
We are awarding \$5,000 scholarships to American and 2 Hispanic students interested in math and science. Applications are due April 6. Must be a high school senior in a Council district. Apply online at cgcs.org/scholarships!



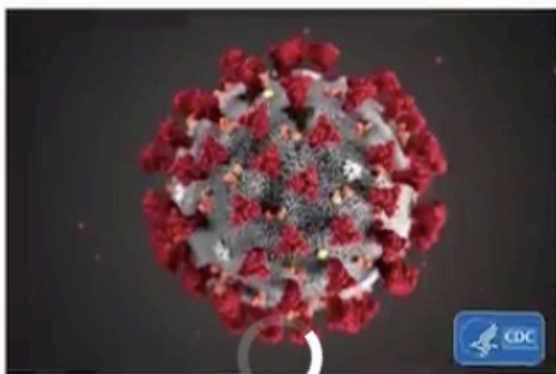
Read the letters the Council sent to Congress urging immediate federal financial assistance to the nation's public schools to fight the coronavirus. To read the letter to the Senate click here: tinyurl.com/vdpod2z. Letter to the House click here: tinyurl.com/qwau5d



We're always on the move! Today the Council team is in @SAISD working with teachers and administrators sharing ideas on ways to improve foundational skills and complex text instruction in dual language and monolingual classrooms. Where do you think we'll end up next?



CGCS @GreatCitySchls · Mar 17, 2020
Our March edition newsletter is out! Stories on: Big-City Schools Working to Contain COVID-19; New Leaders Named in @MetroSchools and @NPSchools; @ELPASO_ISD Twins Accepted to @WestPoint_USM @NavalAcademy. Make sure to subscribe so you don't miss out on next issue!



Nation's Big-City Public Schools Working Aggressively To Contain the Coronavirus

On January 31, Seattle Public Schools posted its first message about the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) on the district website shortly after the first coronavirus case in the United States was confirmed in Washington. Since then, the school district has kept students and parents continuously informed by posting [information on its website](#) and social media channels, creating an FAQ, sending letters to staff and families, and featuring on its YouTube channel a [daily video of Seattle Schools Superintendent Denise Juneau](#) addressing community concerns as they occur.

0:20 154 views

2020 Highlights



CGCS
@GreatCitySchls

In a letter to Congress, the Council and school district superintendents work for local school systems in the next supplemental appropriations bill. Lett tinyurl.com/ycxaxx7w Press Release: tinyurl.com/y9mdclgx



CGCS
@GreatCitySchls

Today is the day! April 1st is Census Day! Make sure to complete your [#2020Census](https://2020census.gov) and count everyone living (or sleeping) in your home most of the time as of today whether you are related to them or not. Respond now at [2020CENSUS.GOV](https://2020census.gov).



The new the app



CGCS
@GreatCitySchls

With [#COVID19](https://www.covid19.com), appropriately supporting [#ELLs](https://www.ell.org) is more important than ever. For provisional placement of potential ELLs, we've developed sample questionnaires with [@BostonSchools](https://www.bostonpublicschools.org), [@kcpublicschools](https://www.kcpublicschools.org), [@pbcasd](https://www.pbcasd.org), and [@SAISD](https://www.saisd.org). Download at bit.ly/2Q6SpiY.

0:17 9K views

Happy
Census Day!



Assessing Language Proficiency during Extended School Closures



2020 Highlights



CGCS
@GreatCitySchls

Congrats to Eliska Peacock from @dcpublicschools, Raul Ayala from @dallaschools, Vanessa Cid from @MDCPS and Abani Neferkara from @PPSConnect for winning the 2020 CGCS-Bernard Harris Math and Science Scholarship. Each scholar will receive \$5,000 bit.ly/2NgUvff



Eliska Peacock
District of Columbia



Raul Ayala
Dallas Independent



Vanessa Cid
Miami-Dade County



Abani Neferkara
Portland



CGCS
@GreatCitySchls

Statement by Michael Casserly, Executive Director, Council of the Great City Schools on the Killing of George Floyd. Read the full statement at: tinyurl.com/y93o3s6n



The nation's urban public schools offer our full-throated condemnation of the killing of George Floyd and the racism behind



CGCS
@GreatCitySchls

Council Files Amicus Brief Against Department of Education Diverting Money from Public to Private Schools During COVID-19 Pandemic

Click tinyurl.com/y47ljuuy to read press release

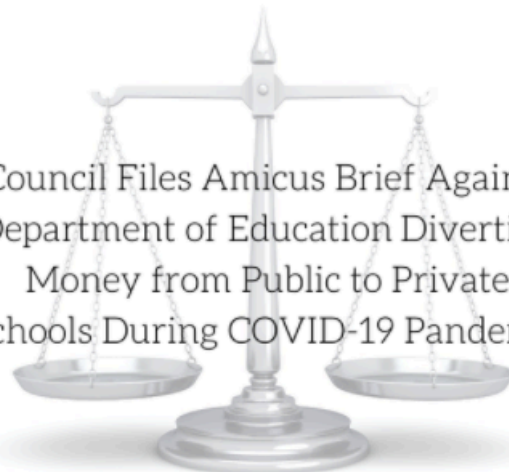


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@dallaschools student Angelina Solis is heading to Texas A&M after finishing in the top 15 of her class. Click here cgcs.org/Page/1117 to read more.



Council Files Amicus Brief Against Department of Education Diverting Money from Public to Private Schools During COVID-19 Pandemic



2020 Highlights



The Council is holding its 64th Annual Fall Conference virtually, Oct. 13-17. The theme is "Championing Urban Education." Click here to register event.me/mq23vz



Our 9th #COVID19 "Returning to School" report focuses on #ELLs, the fastest-growing group in Great City Schools. Despite pandemic hardships, ELLs are resilient. Now is the time to harness their experiences for rich, content-based language instruction. See cgcs.org/corona.



The Council offers recommendations for the President-elect Biden Education Transition Team. Read more of our recommendations in this report. tinyurl.com/y4sr2m6v



🎉🎉🎉 Congratulations to Michael Hinojosa, superintendent of the [@dallasschools](https://twitter.com/dallasschools) on winning the 2020 Green-Garner Award. #CGCS20



THE URBAN EDUCATOR

Urban Educator



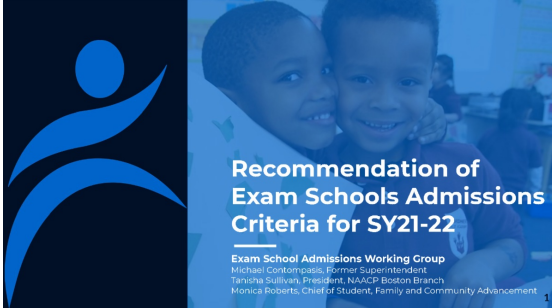
Council Releases Education Recommendations to the Incoming Biden Administration

While working hard to ensure the safety and health of students and staff due to the COVID-19 pandemic, urban public schools face substantial financial shortfalls from the nation's weakening economy. In addition, big-city schools are grappling with racial and ethnic equity and justice.

[Read More](#)

NYC and Boston School Districts Change School Admission Policies

The nation's largest school district recently announced a new middle and high school admissions policy to ensure more diverse



schools in the aftermath of COVID-19.

[Read More](#)



Student Leaders Say It's Time to Rewrite History Lessons at Town Hall

Twin ideas dominated the discussion among student leaders speaking to a virtual audience of urban school educators at the Town Hall session of the 64th Annual Fall Conference: In their view, it's long past time to tell the full, unvarnished history of the United States, and it's time to commit to candid, fact-based discussions of social justice issues.

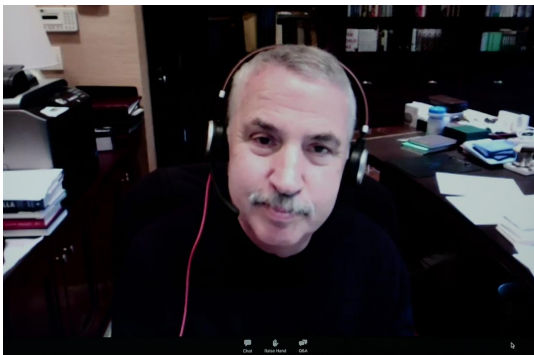
[Read More](#)



Laura Bush, Ibram X. Kendi and Julian Castro Address Council at Virtual Fall Conference

Over the course of a remarkable life, Laura Bush has been a teacher, librarian and book author and has launched education and health-care programs in the United States and abroad. And education issues remain a top priority.

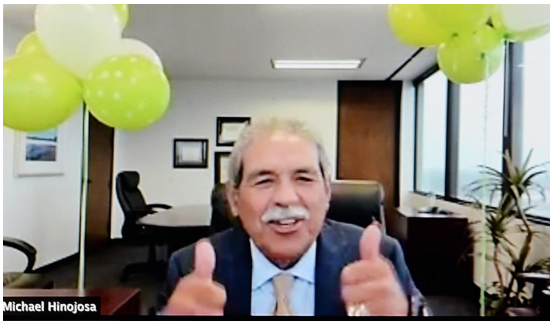
[Read More](#)



Pulitzer-Prize Columnist Thomas Friedman Participates in Panel Discussion on Education

Thomas Friedman, author of the 2005 global best-seller *The World Is Flat*, called on educators to form “complex, adaptive coalitions” in their local communities to best serve students in what he called “a fast, fused, deep world ... that is completely shortening the half-life of skills.”

[Read More](#)



Dallas Leader Recognized as Urban Superintendent of the Year

After the tornado, after the COVID-19 pandemic, Michael Hinojosa, the superintendent of the Dallas Independent School District, thought 2020 could not get any fuller.

[Read More](#)



Council Chair O'Neill: "Let's Learn Better Together"

In his opening remarks at the Council of the Great City Schools' virtual 64th Annual Fall Conference, board chair Michael O'Neill focused on the merits of collaboration and experiential learning – for school leaders as well as for students.

[Read More](#)



Detroit and Buffalo Leaders Tenure Extended; Denver Superintendent Headed to Dallas

Nikolai Vitti has been superintendent of the Detroit Public Schools Community District since 2017, and under his leadership the district improved its financial operations and was recently released from state financial oversight.

[Read More](#)



Voters Decide on Education Ballot Issues

Election Day brought good news for several big-city school districts and students who will benefit from new and improved learning environments with updated infrastructure and technology.

[Read More](#)



Fresno Superintendent Sings His Gratitude

Bob Nelson, superintendent of California's Fresno Unified School District, sings his version of Alicia Key's "Good Job" dedicated to the district's employees.

[Click Here](#)



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A newsletter published by the Council of the Great City Schools, representing 76 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).