

NYC DOE School Reopening Considerations - June 9 2020

Dear Colleagues,

I hope you and your families are safe and healthy. At this moment you are serving our students, families, and colleagues not only in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, but as we mourn anew the senseless loss of Black men and women at the hands of police, and confront the institutional racism from which it springs. I remain amazed and humbled by your commitment and perseverance.

It is my job to be an anchor for you and provide as much support, leadership, and guidance as possible during these difficult and unpredictable times. Today I am writing with an important update about how the reopening of school buildings in the fall.

We started planning for this return the moment that we closed buildings in March. While there are still significant uncertainties with respect to COVID-19 and its impact on New York City in the months ahead, one thing is for sure: it will take all of us working together to rise to the occasion to support student learning, address the trauma of COVID-19 disruption and loss, and keep our children on a path to success.

Since we cannot yet predict what September will look like, we can—and we must—be prepared for a range of possibilities. Our job is to be ready and nimble.

That is why we are looking at all aspects of our academic

programs and school operations, and have developed what we are calling the Fall Framework, consisting of 8 key areas outlined below. That framework reflects our discussions with labor partners and an advisory group of seasoned principals, and is guiding our planning and organization at a citywide level. It spans a universe of areas we must consider.

Similar considerations around health and safety will guide when and how we return to office buildings. As noted previously, right now we anticipate that most staff will continue to work from home until at least the end of June. We are working with our City agency partners on guidance for office locations not just for DOE, but across the city, and will let you know as soon as we have more information.

In the meantime, I want to ensure you are aware of these key planning considerations:

1. **Enhanced Health Measures:** This is priority #1 for a clear reason: we need to ensure that schools and other office buildings are well-equipped to manage the enhanced health requirements that are necessary to protect against COVID-19 infection. This includes PPE and other equipment, supplies, social distancing protocols, and monitoring of health indicators required to protect our children, teachers, and staff. While we continue to assess guidance to determine the specific protocols that will be implemented, we are confident we will need enhanced safety measures as we return to our buildings, and are continuing to work with the Health Department on what those look like.
2. **Trauma-Informed Transition Back to School:** The start of the 2020-2021 school year will be unlike any other that we've experienced. We know students and staff alike are experiencing a lack of closure from physically being out of school buildings since March of the current school year. We know that we must have a

thoughtful process to reacclimate children, parents, and staff to being back in school buildings. This means we must focus on the social-emotional needs of school communities while implementing trauma-informed approaches to teaching and learning.

- 3. Blended Learning:** Our schools have done a tremendous job adapting to remote learning over the past three months. We know that this has helped to close the digital divide, and we are incredibly proud and grateful for the heroic work of our students, families, and educators in keeping learning going amidst these unprecedented conditions. Even when we return to a traditional school day, we can prepare for a restart in the fall by leveraging approaches of both in-person and remote instruction—what I refer to as blended learning—to support our transition from remote learning and maximize both face-to-face and online instruction.
- 4. School Start Date:** We are wholeheartedly working towards a September start date, while working closely with DOHMH to monitor health indicators to ensure that it is safe to return to school buildings and offices.
- 5. Rolling/Phased Starts:** Traditionally, all staff and students begin their respective school years at the same time. We are seeing so far that other countries are modifying schedules, and/or starting groups of students in person at different times. This year for us, the timing of return to buildings, and under what circumstances buildings might be closed or have limited access, will be established in close coordination with NYC Health and based on health and safety indicators.
- 6. Social Distancing and Split Schedules:** Based on health protocols, we must assess how social distancing could be implemented. Building capacity will need to be adjusted to reflect

what the CDC, State, and City determine to be best for health and safety. We can't predict what will be true in September, but as of now we are anticipating that social distancing will remain in effect. This means we may need to limit the number of students and staff in our buildings and we will need to think creatively about schedules.

7. **Building Operations:** Building operations also need to be adjusted to ensure that schools and other DOE work settings are safe, healthy places for students and staff. Building procedures will need to allow for limitations to movement of students and staff into, out of, and within the building, and for facilitation of enhanced cleaning and sanitation protocols.

8. **School Support Services:** School busing and school food operations will also need to be adjusted to accommodate health and safety operations. This complex area will be carefully analyzed and approached in the coming days and weeks.

In each of the above areas, we must prioritize **equity, excellence, and resilience**. Equity means that we will account for the disproportionate impacts of this pandemic across New York City communities and neighborhoods over the past several months, and the different physical spaces we share. Excellence ensures we are laser-focused on providing the best, highest-quality instruction for our children regardless of where that learning is taking place. Resilience means that we are adaptive and nimble for an uncertain future.

We will be engaging with families, parent leaders, community partners, students, and staff in the coming weeks to learn more about what they would like to see reflected in reopening plans.

I thank you for your continued flexibility and patience. Along with all senior leadership, I am here for you as we continue in our work

to serve students, colleagues, and families during this challenging time.

In unity,

Richard