

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

August 30, 2021

Ms. Meisha Porter
Chancellor
New York City Department of Education
52 Chambers St.
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chancellor Porter:

Students and families in all five boroughs of New York City experienced the impact and challenges of remote learning. For many families, the COVID-19 pandemic taxed our schools, including educators and administrators, in the transition to virtual learning and hybrid models. The reality is that this COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the forefront many underlying disparities in our educational system that we cannot afford to deny. From broadband access to food insecurity, New York City students and families faced unprecedented challenges due to the pandemic, and many of these challenges remain today – and likely will continue into the start of the planned 2021-2022 school year.

As we have heard from many students, families, and educators: students want to return to the classroom, and teachers and families alike want to make sure that in-person reopening can happen in a safe and properly resourced manner. As students and their families prepare to return to their schools this fall, it is vitally important that we ensure they are fully supported, with their health and safety remaining the top priority – and that is why I'm writing to you today.

With the prevalence of the Delta variant of COVID-19 in New York City and around the country on the rise, it is my hope that the New York City Department of Education (DOE) implementing its Academic Recovery Plan will successfully provide all DOE students, educators, and families assurances and contingencies to ensure the health and safety of our children and their families as they come back to school this fall.

I respectfully request the New York City Department of Education consider this list of 10 tenets prior to reopening our schools for the 2021-2022 Academic Year:

1. Reduce class size to ensure social distancing is maintained and robust reinforcement of universal mask mandate in New York City school;
2. Stagger timing of groups of students for lunch and other periods where students gather en-masse such as during recess and physical education;
3. Provide hand sanitizer stations in all buildings including high-traffic locations including entrances, exits, occupied classrooms, elevators, restrooms, and multipurpose areas;
4. Minimum of one certified nurse on campus at every school and daily temperature checks for all school staff;

5. Weekly COVID-19 testing for all persons and monitoring through random mandatory testing as currently done in Summer Rising 2021 programs in the city;
6. Ensure availability of the COVID-19 vaccine for all educators and administrators who have not yet completed the vaccination schedule;
7. Adequate cleaning and disinfection of classrooms, regularly touched surfaces and high traffic areas; and ensuring proper ventilation systems are in place;
8. Make before and after school care and daycare services available to allow parents to successfully return to work;
9. Increase available tutors, educational support, and technology resources such as laptops to allow students to catch up during the gap year in learning.
10. Implement a review advisory board or taskforce for families facing challenges preventing them from sending their student to school in-person to determine their eligibility to return to virtual learning.

I commend both yourself and Mayor DeBlasio for your announcement of the NYC Academic Recovery Plan to help students make up learning disruptions brought on by the pandemic – which was funded in large part by both federal relief from the *American Rescue Plan*, as well as with additional funding from the New York City Council. This plan focusing on six major components will improve early literacy, increase digital access, provide college and career counseling, bolster special education programs, build a new and robust universal curriculum, and expansion of emotional support; all of which are vitally important to our students' success.

As students return to the classroom, it is our responsibility as public servants to ensure that they have access to adequate resources, gaps in learning brought on by the disruption are addressed, no student be left to fall behind, and above all, their health and safety be kept as the top priority. I look forward to working with you, as well as other federal, state, and local leaders, educators, and administrators here in New York City and beyond to provide the support and resources our families need as students return to the classroom this fall – and I eagerly await your response to these recommendations.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter, and your consideration of these recommendations, and I look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,



Adriano Espallat
Member of Congress
13th Congressional District of New York

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