

Grassroots Education Movement Demands for Safe and Equitable Reopening of our Schools

We call on Chicago Public Schools, the City of Chicago, Chicago City Council and Cook County officials, the Governor and state legislators, Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois and Chicago Departments of Public Health to take immediate, bold action to lead, and protect the health and safety of our students, educators, and school communities.

Put community safety first to guide safe and equitable reopening of schools.

Illinois has done better at reducing COVID than a lot of states. But better is a relative term. Data shows that Black and Brown communities have been hit harder, and that impact is hidden when results are reported for the county as a whole. Data also shows that as restrictions have loosened and more people are gathering together, COVID rates have gone up. The first wave of COVID is not yet over and scientists have warned us to expect a second wave that may be further exacerbated by flu season. Clearly now is not the time to gather children from vulnerable families together, knowing that even if we have perfect safety practices in schools, they all spend the other 17 hours of their day in less controlled environments. It is not a question of if, but a question of when it will spread in the schools. We are not willing to risk the health and lives of our students, their families, and our teachers. The uncertainty over school reopening and failure to use a common-sense approach with the available data is preventing the concerted development of high-quality remote learning practices needed for a robust program in the fall that serves all students equitably and safely.

We demand public health efforts that protect our most vulnerable families along with recovery efforts that ensure families can survive and flourish in the face of related pandemic effects on housing, income, jobs, and child care.

We demand an immediate announcement that all education will be remote in the fall and 100% effort to ensure a strong remote learning program with extensive supports built in for families and thorough guidance for teachers that all can be confident in.

We demand public health efforts that protect our most vulnerable families along with recovery efforts that ensure they survive and flourish in the face of related pandemic effects on housing, income, jobs, and child care.

Protect the Health of our Communities

Our State, County, and City governments must act immediately to control and prevent community spread of the COVID-19 virus that disproportionately affects our Black, Brown, and low-income communities. **The public good must be valued over profits.**

- Limit public gatherings (restaurants, bars, beaches, malls, etc.).
- Free and accessible rapid testing for all.
- 90% contact tracing before schools reopen in person.
- Exact criteria with objective, science-based health metrics; timelines established to determine when to move to in-person schooling and made publicly accessible to all.

Protect our Students' Families from the Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

While COVID19 can infect anyone, it has disproportionately harmed Black and Brown communities. It has created another wave of inequities: housing, healthcare, childcare, and income.

- Dedicated city and state funding for affordable housing. Moratorium on evictions, foreclosures, public utility and water shut-offs in Chicago for the duration of the COVID pandemic. Pass the *Bring Chicago Home* ordinance in City Council.
- Universal basic income for parents, or other income supports for parents.
- Universal, free child care for all families in-district, with well-funded safety measures for child care programs.
(group sizes no larger than 10, access to cleaning and PPE, sufficient paid sick time for staff, higher pay for child care workers in centers and homes, and a union for all child care center workers. Specific guidance for when a child care center should be closed, e.g. when a child or staffer tests positive, etc.)
- Equip child care centers to support remote learning (wifi, computers, outlets).

We demand an immediate announcement that all education will be remote in the fall and 100% effort go to ensuring a strong remote learning program with extensive supports built in for families and thorough guidance for teachers that all can be confident in.

Implement High-Quality Remote Learning in Chicago Public Schools for Fall 2020

CPS should announce immediately that learning for all students will be remote-only so families and teachers can prepare.

- Provide free laptops & free high-speed internet service for every public school student.
- Adequate weekly preparation time for educators to prepare high-quality remote instruction.
- Provide professional development for educators on best practices in remote learning including non-digital activities (e.g. play or project based).

- Curriculum should be relevant to students' lives, current events and what caring for each other looks like.
- Create more opportunities for small group and 1-1 intervention.
- Provide resources (school supplies, art materials, lab supplies) that families can pick up at their children's schools.
- Hire and train parents, bus aides, and security guards to do outreach to families to assess their needs, assist with classroom instruction, etc.

Remote instruction must pay attention to our most vulnerable students

Students with special needs, English Language Learners, and Students in Temporary Living Situations (STLS) have been poorly served by remote learning to date and must be provided with additional resources to meet their needs.

- Provide 1-1 support for kids learning how to read, English learners, & children with IEPs.
- Hire more counselors and clinicians.
- Recruit parent mentors for every classroom.
- CPS should monitor and quickly provide supports and resources for families that are currently homeless or become homeless during the year due to COVID effects.

Engage parents as partners in learning

Parents have always been critical to the success of their children, but now we need them as partners more than ever before. Both virtually and when we return to socially distanced classrooms, parents can be trained to fill many roles and receive payment that will help make up for lost work hours.

- Hire and train parents to fill a variety of essential roles.
(make family engagement calls and connect families with needed services, answer remote learning questions, help families with tech support, provide socially distanced one-on-one tutoring, provide assistance for individuals or small groups during virtual class times)
- Where possible, start the year with outdoor, socially distant family visits. Where not possible, promote virtual meet-and-greets between teachers and families.
- Emphasize regular communication between school, teachers and parents.

Use remote learning time to prepare for safe phase-in of in-person learning

Our immediate priority must be to prepare for remote learning. But many gaps exist in the plan that was released for hybrid learning and those gaps must be filled prior to initiating in-person learning.

- Schools can only reopen when agreed-upon, transparent health metrics are met.
- Ensure a teacher-to-student ratio of 1:10 and socially distant learning available to every student, with no prejudice to students who opt to continue full remote-learning.
- Provide sufficient PPE, hand sanitizer, soap and water, and CDC-approved disinfectant supplied for every school, classroom and office.
- Conduct daily temperature and symptom checks for students and staff and regular COVID-19 testing.
- Present clear quarantine and treatment protocols for if/when a student tests positive.
- Hire sufficient union custodial staff to sanitize school buildings on a daily basis.

- Every school needs to have a high-quality air ventilation system.
- Develop a comprehensive city-wide plan for safe before- and after- care.

Police-Free Schools and Social-Emotional Supports

Prior to COVID and George Floyd's murder, a huge number of CPS students were experiencing trauma. Because conditions have heightened trauma, students' social and emotional needs must be prioritized in terms of both time and resources.

- Eliminate School Resource Officers (SROs) from CPS and re-invest the \$33 million for the CPD contract in non-police supportive services.
(Money should go back to the school to use for social-emotional and restorative justice support including counselors, social workers, nurses, trauma-informed personnel, and restorative justice programs and practitioners.)
- CPD must return to CPS the portion of the SRO contract funds that weren't needed during remote learning.
- Reduce the student-to-counselor ratio to 50:1 from 650:1.
- Provide a school nurse and mental health specialist for every 100 students in every school.
- Eliminate suspensions and expulsions and fully resource school-level restorative justice programs and student leadership development. Students should not be punished for not wearing masks.
- Provide Professional Development training (PD) for all relevant school staff in trauma-informed learning.
- Remote schedule should include dedicated time for Social Emotional Learning and trauma-informed practices during the day.

Strengthen, don't punish, our schools

We must prioritize the health and well-being of students and their families over attendance and completion of work.

- Eliminate ALL standardized testing.
- Negotiate a grading policy that is not punitive, supports students, and includes them in defining opportunities to show mastery.
- Design pedagogy around project-based learning, using portfolio assessments and other growth evaluation models.
- Eliminate SQR. No reward or punishment for attendance metrics.
- Moratorium on school closures for 5 years.

Community Colleges and Universities

Students at the college level face similar struggles to CPS students and need similar supports to be safe and successful.

- Require all learning and supports to be remote to start off the school year.
- Hold community discussions at the school/college/university level grounded in the best available science to inform re-opening plans.
- Embed part-timers in the classroom (such as aides and tutors) to support students.
- Ensure free access to quality broadband and provide computer technology for community college and university students.

Organizational Sign On:

Action Now Institute
Brighton Park Neighborhood Council
Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression (CAARPR)
Chicago Coalition for the Homeless
Chicago Democratic Socialists of America
Cook County College Teachers Union - 1600
Chicago Teachers Union
Enlace Chicago
Grassroots Collaborative
Journey for Justice
Kenwood Oakland Community Organization
Lift the Ban Coalition
Logan Square Neighborhood Association
Northside Action 4 Justice
Parents 4 Teachers
Pilsen Alliance
Raise Your Hand
SEIU HCIIMK
Teachers for Social Justice