



COMMUNITY EDUCATION COUNCIL DISTRICT 3

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April 22, 2021

Chancellor Meisha Porter
NYC Board of Education
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chancellor Porter,

The members of Community Education Council – District 3 (“CEC3”) would like to congratulate you on your appointment as Chancellor of the New York City Department of Education (the “DOE”). CEC3 looks forward to working with you and your administration over the coming months. COVID-19 has caused significant issues throughout the New York City public school system, including District 3. As we head into the final stretches of the 2020-2021 school year, CEC3 would like to address a few significant concerns that pertain to District 3. Please note, these are not all of the issues District 3 faces and we look forward to a more in-depth discussion at a later date.

Enrollment

The DOE must work with CEC3 to improve enrollment issues in District 3, in particular the Harlem-portion of District 3.

1. Enrollment at our Harlem zoned schools is particularly distressing. Most families in the Harlem portion of District 3 do not send their children to their zoned elementary schools. We must address the underlying question as to why families are opting not to attend their zoned elementary school or District 3 schools all together. What improvements must be made to keep these families at home. If we don’t act in the near future, the existence of some of our schools will be in jeopardy.
2. Charter Schools continue to wreak havoc on District 3 enrollment. District 3 is unfairly burdened by a disproportionate number of charter schools within the district and, in particular, the Harlem portion of District 3. The over-abundance of charter schools in District 3 is drawing students and resources away from our local public schools. The Harlem portion of District 3 is home to 7 charter schools and 6 public elementary schools. As of the 2018 school year, 16% of District 3 students were enrolled in charter schools while the Citywide average was approximately 99%. The disparity only underscores the undue burden placed on District 3. Time and time again, CEC3 has highlighted the utter disregard by the charter authorizing entities for the facts on the ground in District 3 and we struggle to see how these charter schools have any significant educational benefit to the students of District 3. In addition, all

too often we are faced with the stories of how shared space does not work and often the public school is left scrambling for space or struggling for the use of facilities.

3. Providing detailed plans for middle and high school admissions, the criteria for such admissions and the timeframes for families to follow.

School Reopening

Reopening New York City schools, in September may arguably be the most important school opening in the history of the DOE. It is imperative that the DOE address the following concerns:

1. Ensuring a safe, in-school experience for the students and families that elect to return to school for in-person learning.
2. Ensuring a safe, in-school experience for teachers and staff.
3. Ensuring that the social and emotional needs of our students and families are addressed before schools reopen. Many students and families have struggled being at-home, separated from their friends and teachers and we don't know how they will respond when they return to school or if they elect to stay remote. The DOE must be prepared to provide services to help achieve a social and emotional balance.
4. A well-articulated return to school plan for elementary, middle and high school students for the remainder of the year and the upcoming school year. With increased vaccination amongst teachers, staff and families, the relaxation of the 2-infected student rule and the move to 3-foot social distancing rather than 6-feet, in person learning should be available for all families that elect to return.
5. Clearly communicating the DOE's return to school plan and providing detailed information regarding such a plan. In addition, contingency plans should be addressed and communicated to families. The DOE needs to address all contingencies in a timely fashion and should communicate with families well in advance of the beginning of the school year.
6. Ensuring an equitable experience for the students and families that select remote education. This includes equal access to teachers, equal learning opportunities for remote learners, a well-developed curriculum and functional devices for student use.
7. Ensuring that enough teachers are hired and available to all schools so that school staffing needs are appropriately addressed.
8. Engaging parent leaders in school reopening discussions. Far too often, the DOE simply leaves parent input to the side and this past year was no exception. The lack of trust between the DOE, parents and parent leaders grew increasingly worse since March 2020. The road to repairing this distrust is to be overly inclusive with parent engagement and to be forthcoming with plans and any changes to the plans.
9. Clearly articulating the DOE's plans for school reopening. Over the past school year, the DOE missed many opportunities to clearly communicate with families in advance of the DOE's positions and actions. Oftentimes announcements were made via Twitter or social media at late hours or just prior to a school vacation. Parents were left feeling that many decisions were hastily and sloppily put together.
10. Considering the use of outdoor spaces as alternative learning venues.

Students with Disabilities

The DOE needs to prioritize and fix the broken model of serving students with disabilities. Students with disabilities have had a particularly hard time adjusting to remote and disrupted learning. CEC3 has specific questions about students services during the pandemic:

1. For students who have missed services, will they be offered make-up services through the summer?
2. What happens if a parent disagrees with the IEP team and refuses compensatory education services?
3. Transportation services- Are parents being reimbursed?
4. How is the IEP team measuring student's goals?
5. How are evaluations being done? If the class observations are based on online class, is it an accurate representation of that child's abilities? Will parents be able to easily request reevaluation for in-person learning?

The DOE must develop a plan with benchmarks for improving the educational outcomes of students with disabilities, ensuring they receive the instruction and services to which they are entitled and ensuring families receive information about their rights and options. This includes changing the relationship with families. The special education system in New York is an adversarial one and needs to do better to work with parents as partners. The DOE must address special education shortages. In preschool special education classes there is a chronic shortfall of special education classes which will likely be exacerbated as the DOE extends 3K. Shortages continue in bilingual special education evaluations and classes. Students should receive their mandated services, including bilingual services, in their schools—not via vouchers that are difficult and unwieldy to use.

School Nurse Vacancies

Currently, one-half of all schools in District 3 are without a permanent nurse on staff. The lack of nurses in our schools is negligence, plain and simple. It is completely unacceptable that some schools are forced to share nurses while others have no nurses at all, and this is an issue that has existed for more than a decade. Before the pandemic, NYC schools had to employ approximately 700 contract nurses in order to meet the needs of a school system made up of 1800 schools but only 1400 nurses. With the increase of medical conditions such as asthma, allergies, and diabetes, along with the ever increasing number of charter schools and off-site programs, the need for additional nurses has also grown.

Concurrently, the stratified pay structure of nurses employed by the DOE versus the Department of Health, has created a landscape of strife among nurses, making vacancies challenging to fill. In order for the Mayor to keep his promise to have a nurse for each school before reopening, we brought nurses to New York from around the country, and at the end of June, their contracts will expire. This will leave our school system with hundreds of vacancies right when the Summer Rising program is scheduled to begin.

Finally, thousands of students with underlying health issues have no healthcare service outside of the home, except for the school nurse. CEC3 has been told that remote student medical cases are not

managed by the school nurse, putting many students at risk from diabetes, asthma, allergies, and mental health issues. The nursing shortage must be addressed and fixed for the remainder of the school year and for the upcoming school year.

We look forward to working with you and your administration in the future as we work to tackle some very difficult issues facing the families in District 3.

Respectfully,

CEC3

cc: Governor Andrew Cuomo

Executive Superintendent, Manhattan, Marisol Rosales
District 3 Superintendent Christine Loughlin
Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer
NYC Public Advocate Jumaane Williams
NYC Comptroller Scott Stringer
NYS Regents Member, 1st District, Nan Eileen Mead
Panel for Educational Policy Member, Michael Kraft
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State Assembly Member Robert J. Rodriguez
State Senator John Liu, Chair, Subcommittee on NYC Education
State Senator Shelley Mayer, Chair, Committee on Education
State Senator Brian Benjamin
State Senator Brad Hoylman
State Senator Robert Jackson
State Senator Jose M. Serrano
U.S. Congressman Adriano Espaillat
U.S. Congressman Jerrold L. Nadler
United Federation of Teachers President Michel Mulgrew
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Community Board 10 Chair Cicely Harris