



# CHICAGO TEACHERS UNION

September 28, 2020

## VIA Electronic Mail

Mayor Lori Lightfoot  
City of Chicago  
121 N. LaSalle Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Chicago, Illinois 60602

**Re: The Rest of School Year 2020-21**

Dear Mayor Lightfoot:

This letter concerns the ongoing planning around how Chicago Public Schools can safely and successfully conduct the remainder of the current school year. Our members long for nothing more than to be in their classrooms with their students, but it is crucial to remember two (2) things as we plan for the rest of the school year: 1) Remote learning is a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic that has taken over 200,000 American lives; and 2) remote learning can be vastly improved through collaboration and cooperation between CPS and the Chicago Teachers Union.

When CPS and the Chicago Department of Public Health made the decision that the first academic quarter would be conducted through fully remote learning they did so based upon the clear criteria that fully remote learning was the only safe option when the City is averaging more than 200 COVID cases per day, when the positivity rate is rapidly increasing, or when there is inadequate hospital capacity. Under those criteria, CPS will be unable to reopen anytime soon. The current rolling 7-day average puts Chicago at 299 new cases per day. And there are numerous Chicago zip codes, especially in vulnerable Black and Brown communities, with double-digit positivity rates, including 20% in 60629, 14% in 60617, and 14% in 60623. These are the same communities that have already experienced a disproportionate share of COVID-related deaths and the associated trauma.

Despite this, it appears to us that CPS is planning to rush headlong into a resumption of in-person learning at the beginning of November, regardless of whether public health conditions meet the previously outlined criteria. If CPS plans to disregard its previous public health metrics criteria for resuming in-person learning, three (3) questions emerge:

- 1) What will the new criteria be?
- 2) Is there a number of additional educator, student and community deaths that the Mayor and Chicago Public Schools is willing to accept in order to have in-person school before the pandemic has been contained?
- 3) Is the Mayor willing to make the investments in schools that reopening them safely will require, including upgraded HVAC and ventilation systems and routine comprehensive testing?

Jesse Sharkey  
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### *Affiliations*

American Federation of Teachers, Illinois Federation of Teachers, American Federation of Labor – Congress of Industrial Organizations, Illinois Federation of Labor – Congress of Industrial Organizations, and Chicago Federation of Labor, Industrial Union Council



Even when the City meets the previously established public health metric criteria, the resumption of in-person learning will pose a serious risk of a resurgence of the virus if the city and the school district do not make significant investments in safety. First, CPS must follow the example of the Los Angeles Unified School District and provide COVID-19 testing to all CPS staff, students, and their families. Second, there is now scientific consensus that the spread of COVID-19 is predominantly airborne, and that poorly ventilated indoor spaces significantly increase the risk of infection. But, currently, 60% of CPS's schools have no central HVAC system, less than 5% have any air purification system installed, 50% have nonfunctional critical components of their air circulation systems, and only 9% have air filtration systems that meet public health recommendations for COVID-19 safety: MERV 13 or portable HEPA filters. For a return to in-person learning to be safe and lasting, the Mayor and CPS must make significant investments in testing, contact-tracing, and ventilation.

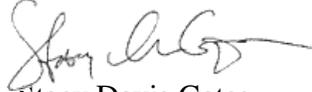
We share CPS's concern about maintaining student enrollment. But a return to in-person learning before it can be done safely, along with timing that will coincide with a potential fall surge in COVID-19 infections currently predicted by public health experts, could be catastrophic for Chicago and its most vulnerable populations. If schools become additional vectors for the anticipated fall/winter COVID-19 spike, the damage to CPS and negative impacts on enrollment will be far worse than any experienced during remote learning.

While it remains unsafe for in-person learning to resume, we must work together to improve the remote learning experience for students and parents, and the City must actually fulfill its promise to deliver high-speed Internet access and adequate devices for all students. To this point, CPS's bargaining team has shown little interest in collaborating with educators to make remote learning work as well as it possibly can. The school district's decision-makers have left the bargaining table. CPS has ignored guidance from the Illinois State Board of Education and has unilaterally implemented remote learning schedules that attempt to overlay an in-person school-schedule onto remote learning, leading to parental frustration and student disillusionment. It has done so without accounting for the unique challenges of remote learning, especially for our district's most vulnerable students, including special education students and English language learners. Other big city school districts such as Los Angeles and Boston have listened to their educators and adopted age-appropriate remote learning best practices informed by educator experience in collaboration with their unions. The CTU continues to stand willing and ready to do this in Chicago, and we urge you to send your bargaining team to the table with directions to do the same.

Sincerely yours,



Jesse Sharkey  
President



Stacy Davis Gates  
Vice President

cc: Janice Jackson, Chief Executive Officer  
LaTanya McDade, Chief Education Officer  
CPS Board Members