



CHICAGO TEACHERS UNION

December 23, 2021

The Honorable Lori Lightfoot
Mayor
City of Chicago
121 N. LaSalle Street, 5th Floor
Chicago, Illinois 60602

Dear Mayor Lightfoot:

I write in follow-up to my letter of December 17 – in a week in which Omicron is exploding across the City in the wake of a weeks-long Delta surge, including among members of our school communities. Just this week, we heard from a member in Lawndale who is herself sick with breakthrough COVID and has infected her four-year-old daughter, who is also sick, while her husband quarantines away from their household with his elderly parents to protect them from breakthrough.

This massive new wave of COVID is marked by a growing amount of breakthrough infection, impacting fully vaxed school staff that include beloved Carnegie Elementary SECA JonL Bush, who was reported positive the Wednesday before Thanksgiving and died the Friday after. Experts believe this growing surge may not [peak until late January](#), long after students and staff are scheduled to return to school buildings on January 3.

Our rank and file members, like educators across the nation, are at higher overall average risk from the consequences of COVID based on demographics alone. Our students' families are at higher risk of COVID sickness and death based on demographics alone. We need protections that maximize safety for our school communities, yet our members have grave concerns about CPS' ability to mitigate the spread of COVID in our buildings when we reopen our doors on January 3.

Testing has remained paltry under CPS' unnecessary insistence on 'opt-in' student testing, thwarting quick case identification, when we should be stepping up testing massively and ensuring that rapid testing can be deployed to any school community in need. Contact tracing continues to remain dangerously slow in identifying cases, and continues to miss cases altogether, when we need swift information now more than ever to prevent spread. Few of our students are vaccinated, at the same time that CPS refuses to build a robust campaign to get shots in the arms of students and families.

At the same time, two years into the pandemic CPS has yet to document actual improvements to ventilation – including whether ventilation systems are capable of mitigating COVID spread. This refusal to share this basic information persists even as health experts across the globe are pointing to the danger of assembling in congregate settings during this dangerous surge, particularly without guarantees of adequate air exchange and filtration to protect people from airborne spread. And CPS has yet to identify a health metric for when there's too much COVID to safely learn in-person, even in the face of record COVID cases among students and staff.

Without vigorous layered mitigation, CPS confronts the real possibility of failing to prevent unnecessary sickness and death from this virus when our schools reopen to students this January. Yet there are immediate steps that the

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District can take starting today to ensure that children and adults in our buildings are as protected as possible in this terrifying surge.

As I wrote on December 17, we urgently need you to direct your CPS team to work cooperatively with us to develop and deploy robust safety protocols that will maximize protections for students and educators returning on January 3.

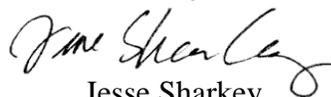
We most immediately need:

- Rapid tests on the first day of school for every student and staff member, to swiftly identify any risk of spread that's developed over winter break.
- Reinstatement of CPS' mandatory health screener procedures, rather than the little-used 'self-screener' that CPS deployed to replace this protection in September.
- A science-based metric to determine when there is too much COVID in a building for students to learn in-person, coupled with a commitment to move to remote learning when minimum staffing levels fall to unsafe levels in buildings, particularly as staff are impacted by COVID. We cannot educate or support our students when we do not have enough trained adults available to care for them or protect them.
- An efficient, timely contact tracing program that provides results within 24 hours and that families can trust.
- The creation at last of a robust vaccination program that gets shots in the arms of all students and families, along with regular, consistent COVID-19 testing for all to identify breakthrough swiftly.
- A school-by-school inventory from CPS on ventilation fixes, including air quality test results, to quickly identify schools in need of immediate review and intervention.

President Biden was clear this week that our safety priorities must be testing, vaccines, good ventilation and adequate staffing – all of the vital mitigations that the federal government is funding through roughly \$2.8 billion in COVID relief funds to CPS. These are the minimums to keep school children and the adults who serve them safe during this dangerous period of COVID spread. And needs like rapid tests on day one for high needs schools are both achievable and vital to protecting our school communities when they return after the holiday. But we cannot do this alone. We need real cooperation from your CPS team.

So again, I implore you to direct your CPS team to collaborate with us over the next week and a half to ensure that our schools can reopen safely on January 3. We, too, want to be in our classrooms with our students this January – and we want to do so safely, with guardrails in place that protect us all. Anything less will cause unnecessary harm, and that is simply unacceptable. Cooperation towards our common safety goals is the path forward – and I urge you to encourage your CPS team to pursue this collaborative path with us immediately.

Sincerely,



Jesse Sharkey
President

JS:gpc

cc: CPS CEO Pedro Martinez
Board of Education President Miguel del Valle
CPS Board Vice President Sendhil Revuluri
CPS Board Member Luisiana Meléndez
CPS Board Member Amy Rome
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CPS Board Member Dwayne Truss