



CHICAGO TEACHERS UNION

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December 17, 2021

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

Dear Mayor Lightfoot:

This week, we learned of two (2) more school communities experiencing serious COVID-19 outbreaks, on top of the 10,000 students Chicago Public Schools itself reported in quarantine. At Park Manor Elementary, five (5) staff members (including the principal) and 11 students have tested positive for COVID-19, and 174 out of 250 (70%) total students in quarantine. Zero students reported to the school yesterday and today.

At Fuller School of Excellence, 233 out of 299 (78%) students were in quarantine this week, and close to a dozen teachers were sent home yesterday.

The facts on the ground are telling us that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to change the course of our daily lives. Denying this is irresponsible and negligent.

At the Chicago Board of Education meeting in November, we were told by CEO Martinez that the district was exploring a metric to be used to determine when in-person learning was no longer safe, and a school or the district should revert to remote learning. But, a month later, Dr. Arwady insists that regardless of the crisis — whether it be at Carnegie, Fuller, Park Manor or dozens of other schools — no metric is needed.

CPS is issuing 150,000 take-home COVID-19 tests to families, which is a step toward safety. Without knowing the results of those tests, however, as well as the impact of the Omicron variant, Dr. Arwady cannot safely say that no metric is needed, or that under no circumstances will schools revert to remote learning. To do so undermines confidence that she is basing her decisions on evidence, which further undermines confidence in the City's ability to protect our school communities.

We cannot have this kind of disconnect between the Chicago Department of Public Health, and the people in our schools and running our district. These types of remarks from your top doctor endanger us all because they completely disregard what our members, students and families are seeing on the ground. And this neglect will not prevent COVID-19 outbreaks in our schools, [nor will it keep our schools open](#), especially with the new, more transmissible Omicron variant already in Illinois.

Further, such disregard will not achieve the stated goal we all share, keeping our students, staff and families safe.

We need you to direct your CPS team to work cooperatively with us to develop a robust set of safety protocols, to be put in place before the end of winter break, that will ensure schools can reopen safely in January. That plan must include:

- A metric to determine when a school or the district should revert to remote learning.
- An efficient, timely contact tracing program that works and that families can trust.
- Vaccinations in the arms of all students.
- Regular, consistent COVID-19 testing for all students.
- Stronger safety committees, to empower individuals closest to the crisis with the ability to act in the interest of maximum safety.

Our members know what their school communities need. They know how to reach families, how to communicate with them, and how to address their worries and fears. Educators do this every day, in every school. That's why CPS families trust them.

Our members must play a critical role in deploying safety plans in their buildings, but the City of Chicago cannot unilaterally undertake a program of this magnitude and effectively keep educators, students and communities safe. The "go it alone" approach is a recipe for disaster. Schools will inevitably close, and students, staff and families will continue to fall ill, or worse.

Again, I implore you to change course. Direct your CPS team to work with us, collaboratively, over the next two (2) weeks to ensure our schools can reopen safely in January.

Sincerely,



Jesse Sharkey
President

JS:yv

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
CPS Board Member Lucino Sotelo
CPS Board Member Elizabeth Todd-Breland
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