

A RESOLUTION

24-367

IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

January 18, 2022

To declare the existence of an emergency with respect to the need to put measures in place that will support the safe return of students to schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and case surges.

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this resolution may be cited as the “Returning to School Safely Emergency Declaration Resolution of 2022”.

Sec. 2. (a) The Omicron variant of the virus that causes COVID-19 has led to a dramatic, exponential increase in cases of COVID-19, making the District a national hotspot for the virus. More than 6,000 cases were reported in the District over the weekend of January 8 and 9. On January 11, Mayor Bowser instituted a limited COVID-19 public health emergency.

(b) The recent surge in cases has further exacerbated the tremendous challenges accompanying a return to in-person learning this past fall for the District’s school communities, leading to confusion and fear among staff, students, and families.

(c) From December 23 to December 26, 2021, over 2,500 DCPS students and 800 DCPS staff tested positive for COVID-19. Notifications to families of these positive cases were delayed significantly. This was particularly detrimental right before a break in which members of the school community planned to visit loved ones or travel and were not timely aware of an exposure. Families need prompt notification of positive cases found in classrooms where their students are learning, and teachers need prompt notification of cases in classrooms where they are teaching.

(d) Currently, it is taking too long for schools to notify families and teachers of positive cases. The consequences of a delay in notification could be dire. Notification within 24 hours of a positive case would allow families and teachers to take proactive steps to take a test and limit contact with vulnerable populations while robust contact tracing is taking place. The current practice is to send notifications to families via email, but not every family has ready access to email. Requiring schools to provide 24 hours’ notice via families’ preferred contact method will ensure that all families are receiving prompt notice regardless of access.

(e) Teachers, principals, and other school-based staff are being asked to do more as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. The Mayor directed funding to give DCPS more support,

including funds for a COVID Strategy and Logistics Coordinator and a full-time substitute teacher. Reporting is necessary to ensure transparency in staffing and school capacity to meet the challenges of the pandemic.

(f) Widespread testing of asymptomatic individuals is critical to prevent transmission and school-wide outbreaks of the COVID-19 virus. The Office of the State Superintendent for Education has stated that they will aim to test 10 to 20% of students each week, with the ability to test up to 30% when cases are high. Reporting the percentage of students receiving asymptomatic testing will give parents and families increased security and assurance regarding safety at their schools and provide Council with an oversight tool.

(g) The best place for students to learn is in school, and to ensure that students can safely stay in the classroom and give families, teachers, and school staff transparency amid the new wave and possible future waves, emergency legislation is necessary.

Sec. 3. The Council of the District of Columbia determines that the circumstances enumerated in section 2 constitute emergency circumstances making it necessary that the Returning to School Safely Emergency Amendment Act of 2022 be adopted after a single reading.

Sec. 4. This resolution shall take effect immediately.