

January 6, 2021

Dear Mayor Lightfoot, Dr. Jackson, Chief McDade, and the members of the Chicago Board of Education:

As the elected representatives of our school community, LSCs have remained an important vehicle for participatory democracy; allowing not only educators, but also parents the opportunity to make important decisions regarding their children's education. Our priority is always the safety and well-being of our community- our students, staff, and their families- while ensuring an equitable education for all students. It is for this reason that we as a Local School Council reject the current CPS reopening plan.

The plan rolled out by Chicago Public Schools for in-person learning does not adequately provide the safety measures necessary to keep every person in our school building safe. The current CPS reopening plan has made commitments and promises to parents and staff as part of the safety-measures and mitigation strategies that are not being followed through. For example, CPS promised an in-depth air quality assessment which included a "multi-stage ventilation and air quality assessments on every room to ensure buildings are properly ventilated". However, only 20% of all classrooms and offices were surveyed at New Field according to the report. In addition, even though CPS promised to do so months ago, they have not completed full installation of safety equipment nor provided additional staff. As reported at our school's town hall on Wednesday, January 6, 2021, New Field has not been provided additional custodial staff to aid in the new cleaning and disinfecting protocols and we have not received enough HEPA air purifiers for each classroom. Moreover, the reopening plan as presented by CPS falls woefully short of meeting the academic, socioemotional, and health needs of our students.

The current timeline to return to in-person learning is not reasonable given the fact that the Covid 19 positivity and death rates in Chicago are higher now than they were when schools closed in the first place. It fails to acknowledge that in our diverse school community, many of our students live in multi-generational homes, and that our student population has been disproportionately impacted by this pandemic. It also fails to acknowledge that fewer than forty percent of CPS families chose to return to in-person learning at this time because, at much personal cost, they are aware it is unsafe to do so.

While Chicago Public Schools claims that in-person learning is what is best for our students, it refuses to recognize that in-person learning would not look at all like it did pre-pandemic. It does not recognize the limitations of a plan that requires teachers and other staff members to teach in two modes simultaneously, while also doing their best to ensure the safety of the students in the classroom. Furthermore, this plan requires that both students and teachers navigate, yet again, uncharted territory at a time when both teachers and families have finally found a rhythm in remote learning.

Our school staff has worked arduously and diligently to build and improve on remote learning practices at New Field. They have worked thoughtfully to adapt curriculum, to provide differentiated instruction, and to do their best to meet the needs of every child and every family in our school. The teachers and staff have spent months enriching their practices and providing the best remote learning experience possible. Another disruption in how these teachers are teaching and how students learn is not in the best interest of our students. Children excel when they have a consistent environment with clear expectations. A new learning plan in the middle of the year is not what is best for our young students.

We want nothing more than for our students to return to the classrooms. However, now is not the time to do so. The CDC has warned us that this is the most difficult time in the public health history of our country. We believe that the best course of action is to return to the classroom when our community has been able to access newly available vaccines and positivity rates are lower. It is what is in the best interest of our students and staff, their families, and the general public.

We will continue to support our families and improve remote learning until it is safe for us all to return to in-person instruction. To meet the needs of all of our community members, we urge CPS to utilize its city-wide resources to provide more robust remote learning support:

- Create in-person pods for students needing hands-on support or those from families without dependable child care that would participate in remote learning with their teachers.
- Increase the availability of safe online learning sites for students and their families.
- Adjust the curricula and testing requirements to work with the alternate teaching/learning reality during the pandemic.

A return to in person learning will create new inequities for students whose families choose to stay remote. Per the New Field Town Hall, these students will be receiving less teacher instruction at more sporadic times to accommodate in-person learning. We ask you to listen to those most impacted by the decisions you are making and collaborate with all stakeholders regarding improving remote learning to meet the needs of all CPS families and reaching a consensus on what is deemed a safe return to in-person learning.

We stand united in our rejection of the current reopening plan, which does not best serve our community, and in our demand that we stay remote until it is safe for all us to be in the building.

Respectfully,
New Field Elementary Local School Council