

September 12, 2021

Mayor Bowser, Deputy Mayor Kihn and Chancellor Ferebee,

We, Shelley Brown (Ward 7) and Danica Petroschius (Ward 6), both parents of children at Capitol Hill Montessori at Logan, write to ask you to urgently strengthen your policies to keep students and families safe in our schools. The data changes daily but there are multiple schools with new cases every day. The virus is spreading quickly across our schools. And we know in our one school it has begun to spread. While one child had a case last week Wednesday, we know that since this past Friday, we personally know of 4 cases just through our over-the-weekend-networks of parents, not the public reporting yet. The numbers of cases in schools are growing quickly causing confusion, fear, disruption and increased inequity. We have to do better, now.

We write on behalf of hundreds of parents and grandparents we are in contact with from all 8 wards in our school and across the city. We also write with in-depth knowledge of how the system is *really* working versus the spin and talking points. Danica's son, a 6th grader who is 11 and therefore unvaxed, contracted COVID the first week of school and has since spread it to his sister and mom (Danica) who are both vaccinated. We are hoping her husband/their Dad (also vaccinated) is spared but we keep testing. Shelley's daughter, (a 6th grader, too young to be vaccinated) just got results today, Sunday, from a test taken Thursday and she is positive. The two parents and one other daughter are all vaccinated and tested negative today, but will test again this week. We both have spent 18 months keeping our families safe from COVID - the only thing that has changed in our lives is going to school. Luckily for us so far, our symptoms are relatively mild or asymptomatic. But for families that have any underlying conditions, elderly family members in the same household and lack of technology access during quarantine, we see clearly now how scary, misguided and inequitable this system you set up is.

We include here an Appendix A that is the communication that we both chose to share with our affected classrooms and school so that you understand what it actually looks like on the ground. We share it exactly as we shared it with our community. We also include as Appendix B the communication that we receive from DCPS when there is a case in the school. You can see how completely inadequate it is. While DCPS cannot share private information about individuals (rightfully so), it can do better to inform families and help them stay safe. It is also clear to us that in too many schools we are creating super-spreader events on a daily basis in ways that can be mitigated by top-down knowledge-sharing, training, resources and policy. In addition, it is clear to us that you have prioritized "in person" over "safety" and "learning." In fact, our policy should prioritize safety and health, then address quality learning systems for all that includes in person and virtual options. That is the only way to achieve all of our health and learning goals with equity.

While this letter is only signed by two parents as we contemplate the fear, anger and guilt we have managed since Danica's son tested positive last Tuesday (our children are in the same class), and the amount of learning we have done, we can confidently say there are hundreds if

not thousands of families that feel the same way as we do. We ask you to move quickly to implement safer conditions and better, equitable learning across our city's schools. We can't wait and hope it all gets better when there are vaccines for under 12. It will take time to implement those vaccines and there will continue to be breakthrough cases (ours is a great example of both unvaccinated and breakthrough cases) - we must mitigate and plan now for the long-term.

The problems are at all levels: the rules set by you are too low - they should set the highest standard for safety, not the lowest, resources are inequitable across the city, and implementation of the rules is wildly inconsistent across the city. Your rhetoric does not match reality. Parents across the city have shared with us, at a minimum:

- "Layered mitigation measures" that you purport to have (see Appendix B) are not happening the way you say they are; they are under-resourced or not effectively implemented at schools across the city
- Safety resources like masks and sanitizer are not available readily in every school
- Outdoors is a huge mitigator and hardly used because of lack of resources, planning and know-how
- Testing is spotty at best or not happening (our school had the random test pool set for the 2nd week and the testers never showed up)
- Testing set-up is often a super spreader event being held inside with multiple groups of kids coming in and out of the same room
- Mask wearing is inconsistent
- Distancing is inconsistent
- Air quality is highly inequitable and inconsistent
- Lack of open virtual option is putting families at serious risk
- Lack of learning plan in quarantine
- Confusion from schools about quarantine rules regarding different timelines and sibling impact

We are glad that DC started with where the CDC started on how to plan for in-person learning. But we expect you to set that as the floor and set the gold standard. Instead you have made the CDC guidelines the ceiling and we are seeing high spread across schools. Two weeks into school should provide a massive learning opportunity to improve your systems swiftly.

As we have gathered information from families in our school and across the city, we see the following as areas that can be strengthened quickly and would have a good chance of curbing spread across all schools:

Transparency: Parents are mostly left in the dark and notification times vary widely from 24 hours to 4 days. We have chosen to treat our situations with full transparency (example Appendix A). We understand with privacy you can't name individual children. But you can do better. DCPS said it would inform families at the classroom level - but it has not; DCPS only announces school-level case notification. *"The school system says it will inform families any time a case is detected in their child's school or classroom."*

https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/bowser-schools-delta-virus-reopen/2021/08/18/be21c90c-004d-11ec-ba7e-2cf966e88e93_story.html and in the Mayor's briefing (Slide 31) https://mayor.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/mayoromb/release_content/attachments/Back-to-School-Updated-Presentation_8-18-2021.pdf. Yet this has not happened. Only families with close contact in the classrooms get notified which are few. Whole classrooms are not notified. Families want to and deserve to know at the class-level so that more families are prompted to test and be watchful to curb spread. We recommend:

- Expedite notification time to class, school and public
- Notify the entire class with the case, not just the few close contacts
- Notify the school community of the class and grade
- Recommend siblings stay home and test before coming back to school

Testing. Testing is too little and inconsistent. At our school, last week our Principal arranged for a random test group and the testers did not show up on the arranged day! In another school, they tested only a few of the students selected then left. If we are to catch asymptomatic and mild cases to curb spread, we need much more testing than 10-20% and we need it consistently. We should:

- Test many more kids weekly and hold the system accountable for doing it well
- Make free testing in school easy and widely available including equipping schools with tests and moving free testing vans in locations close to schools to cover all DCPS schools. For example, one van near our school would allow our school, Ludlow Taylor, JO Wilson and Stuart Hobson, at a minimum, to test easily and still serve the broader community
- Ensure schools have testing resources so that when there is a case in a class/grade, those students can be tested right away in school

Require Lunch Be Outdoors and Provide Necessary Resources. Indoor lunch in schools is a high-risk, potential super spreader activity that is happening in most schools but should be minimized. Schools should provide only outdoor lunch with their class cohorts and only inside in highly inclement weather. The city should provide every school with tents, tables and chairs as well as best practices on how to do this well. Immediately. We acknowledge that you have said that not every school has accommodating outdoor space. To shut down outdoor mandates and supports for those who do is wrong. Mandate and resource every school to eat and COVID test outdoors. Where it is impossible, provide specific trouble shooting for those schools based on their unique circumstances which could include blocking off street space like we do for restaurants all over the city, leveraging nearby parks, looking creatively at each layout, opening every window that can be opened and every door at least six inches to allow for maximum airflow, increase the number of fans and filters those schools have. Be problem solvers for health in schools. We have to do our best to limit super spreader moments.

More Strict and Clear Quarantine Rules. We have swung too far the other way and quarantine too little including telling families that it's up to them to quarantine siblings. Common sense tells us that siblings would be most likely to get the virus. The CDC and you say that a sibling can go

to school if vaccinated and has no symptoms even if another sibling tests positive. Yet if we look at implementation of that, we might learn that is a mistake. Danica's family is a good example. Unvaccinated son had a fever, so both kids stayed home Tuesday. Son tested positive (result on Wed). School and doctor followed CDC guidelines and said that daughter should go to school Wednesday because she is vaccinated and had no symptoms. Then she had congestion on Friday so Danica kept her home and tested her. Results came Saturday as positive for daughter and Danica, who are both vaccinated. This means she was in school, contagious (according to CDC) and possibly infecting others on Wednesday and Thursday - because DCPS and CDC told her to be. As Danica reflects on following the rules, there is great guilt for doing so because she potentially infected others. In hindsight, it is just common sense that siblings in the same household would expose each other - likely in significant doses - during the most contagious times. We rely on city leaders as our experts to guide us in doing the right thing. Parents can't be expected to be health experts.

- Recommend siblings quarantine and test after the 5-day window since exposure before returning to school
- Ensure all schools are clear on quarantine guidelines and provide schools with FAQs that help them answer the many questions parents have when there is a close contact phone call or letter
- Be more clear about quarantine notification – there is a lot of confusion and varied implementation by school leaders including when to quarantine when close contact and what to do if your child is a close contact from multiple people on different days during a class spreading event like ours (i.e. how long does a close contact of Danica's son AND Shelley's daughter - who tested positive on different days - quarantine?)

Better solutions for our PK-ers that need to nap – Besides lunch, nap is another high-risk time of day. Per DC guidelines, nappers cannot wear masks during nap. Yet schools have not been given enough resources to ensure that they are safe during this time.

- Ensure that all schools have HEPA filters to cover every place there are nappers
- Ensure that all schools have adequate cots and cleaning supplies for all nappers
- Require schools to limit the number of nappers in a room to lower the chance of spread
- Ensure that windows and doors remain open as much as possible for air flow

Virtual Options for Families that Need It – Once one person in a household contracts the virus, there is a higher likelihood that others will too, even those who are vaccinated. But the current limited virtual option is based on student need, not family need. What about our families who have compromising underlying conditions or disability? You say to those families that they cannot do virtual because the child does not have the condition. But consider what happened to Danica's family: Her son contracted the virus in school and he's not of age to vaccinate. Now, two others in his family who are vaccinated have it. If any of us were compromised, particularly Mom, Dad, grandparent or other caretaker, and got really sick, the entire family would suffer even more on all levels, emotional, economic, educationally and health-wise. DC is short-sighted on FAMILY health and equity if we don't offer an open virtual option. In addition, an

open virtual option would also alleviate capacity numbers for in person learning so that distancing and other mitigation would be more possible on school sites. We need:

- A robust, quality virtual option for any that want it
- For those who have had to stand up to fight to protect their families' health already and keep kids home, they should not be unenrolled or punished in any way for staying home and should in fact be given quality supports for virtual learning immediately

We have hundreds of millions of federal dollars to be deployed towards exactly these kinds of mitigation efforts. We have to do better.

As parents, we feel rage, fear, worry, guilt, shame and exhaustion all wrapped in one. And our experience is not unique. We write because we feel ethically obligated to share our stories and call for better so that other families, especially those who might be affected in more serious ways, will not go through this.

Please contact us at any time as we would be happy to share more about our experience and ideas for strengthening our school system.

Thank you for your consideration.

Shelley Brown
CHML Parent of Two
Ward 7 Resident
Shelleycarrbrown@gmail.com

Danica Petroschius
CHML Parent of Two
Ward 6 Resident
dpetroschius@yahoo.com

APPENDIX A

Timeline of Danica and Shelley's COVID experience most recent at top

From: Shelley Brown <shelleycarrbrown@gmail.com>

Sent: Sunday, September 12, 2021 5:37 PM

Good evening 6b family,

I wish I could be reaching out to you with better news, but Khiya has tested positive for COVID -19.

Timeline:

9/8- last day at school informed to quarantine by school after 4pm

9/9 took covid test

9/12 Covid test came back positive (rest of family Khamani, my husband and I are all negative).

I hope you all take the time and get your child tested. Khiya has NO Symptoms , No fever, nothing, if it wasn't for her having to quarantine she would have still been in school. Khiya informed me that she sits at a lunch table with 7 other children, I would encourage everyone to please take your child to get tested, we are all scheduled to get tested again on Tuesday just to be safe.

From: dpetroshius@yahoo.com <dpetroshius@yahoo.com>

Sent: Saturday, September 11, 2021 2:24 PM

To: 'Friends of Capitol Hill Montessori' <friends@capitolhillmontessorischool.org>

Subject: My Family's COVID Situation Update

I'm sharing an update that I just sent to my children's 6th and 8th grade classrooms – Please read and keep watchful of your families.

I'm Danica Petroschius, Mom to Grace Whitsell (8th) and Max Whitsell (6th). I have an important update on COVID to share for transparency. You may want to read from the bottom up. I share

below the note I sent to the 6th Grace class Thursday. I have updates for all of you and will share with 6th Grade too.

So Max, 6th, per below has been quarantining since Monday and he would have come back to school on the 17th.

Timeline picks up after the below – I stopped 9/9 below and will pick up here:

9/9

- everyone in the house seems fine
- I notify all Friends of Montessori and 6th grade class about Max.
- Grace (8th) goes to school 9/8 and 9/9 with 2 masks on (KN95 and surgical over it) and is careful – BECAUSE she is vaccinated and has no symptoms and that's what DCPS and the Doctors tell us to do.
- We continue to keep Max in his room quarantining. Only I go inside his room, with a mask, to check on him and change out dishes.

9/10

- Grace wakes up with some congestion. Out of abundance of caution we keep her home from school. She's otherwise fine. I'm fine. My husband is fine.
- 12:30 – Husband, daughter and I (all vaccinated) get tested at the Curative Eastern Market site – just in case.
- Grace congestion lingers no one else sick

9/11

- 2 pm Curative test results come back – Grace and I are positive, husband is negative.
- I try not to fall apart TBH and start emailing – started with the school leadership, now you all

I don't know what to think of this. We quarantined Max. We are vaccinated. Yet here we are. We are going to watch carefully to ensure symptoms aren't worse.

I have NO IDEA what this means for our household quarantines – I will figure that out and report back. Of course Grace and Max will not be at school next week.

MOST IMPORTANTLY: Please get tested. It is most likely this started somewhere in the school. And now we may have inadvertently spread it more – even though we are following ALL of the rules and vaccinated. This is a sneaky, devilish disease. Please take care and watch your family.

Again, as always, I'm an open book. Text (202-744-4160) or email if you have any questions at all. I'm bracing for a LOT of calls from contact tracers so I am just not emotionally or physically able to talk by phone but will text or email as fast as I can.

Virtual hugs to all of our families – CHML is a great community of multi generational families and I am comfortable and happy to share as much as I can as I want everyone safe, safe, safe.

Danica

From: dpetroshius@yahoo.com <dpetroshius@yahoo.com>

Sent: Thursday, September 9, 2021 12:57 PM

To: 'Friends of Capitol Hill Montessori' <friends@capitolhillmontessorischool.org>

Subject: FW: A Message from Principal Adutwum

Hi Friends of Montessori –

I am sharing to fill in about the below communication from Principal Adutwum/DCPS about a case in the school that you were all notified about.

My name is Danica Petroshius, my son is Max Whitsell in the 6th Grade. This communication from PA about a COVID case went out because Max tested positive for COVID. As soon as we got the test, I alerted Principal Adutwum and she alerted DCPS/DC Health. I decided to share with the community for full transparency and some things I've learned in the process- as we are all learning and protecting best we can together. And I can't commit that Max was only near 6th graders last week so I thought it best to share with everyone.

HEADLINE: The good news is that Max is ok. He had a fever and fatigue for about 16 hours then was totally fine. We had him looked at by a doctor and all signs were good. We will struggle to quarantine because he does not want to! But we will do it because we have to.

I'm sharing the timeline below so that you all know. I feel that transparency is more important than anything and I'm sharing as much as I can especially because I worry about kids/families that might have a more severe reaction to the virus. You can see our timeline and some things I've learned. When I notified Principal Adutwum of the test result (Wed 2 pm when I found out from Doctor), she and AP Hoagland went immediately into action to notify DCPS/DC health officials. They started contacting families closely affected quickly/individually and had a community wide letter by 1030 am this am. This is faster than I have heard of at some other schools.

Max must quarantine in his room until the 17th (10 days from Monday when symptoms started). When I go in to check on him and feed him, he and I both wear a mask. My husband and daughter don't go in his room. Doctor gave orders to really isolate. This is not a fun way to live. Just giving you the reality.

Timeline:

8/30 school starts, Max goes to school with double mask (KN95 + surgical) and is old enough to know to keep them on and has been a good mask wearer for a year and a half (including at outdoor baseball where it was not required but he wore them in 90/100 degree heat). I can't attest to all hours in school of course, but I'm trusting he wore his mask well whenever not eating.

9/2 Thursday Max is part of random sampling COVID test at school.

9/6 Monday (holiday) 6-7 PM my son has a fever. (No news on test results from Thurs yet)

9/7 Tuesday

- AM son still has 100.3 fever. Make Dr. Appt. keep him home from school and my daughter in abundance of caution
- 11 am all signs of fever gone
- 1:43 pm email from school that his Thursday test is negative
- 3 pm Dr appt, he looks good but we take test
- 3 other (vaxed) people in family get negative test results

9/8 Wed

- Allow Daughter to school because no symptoms and vaxed per rules
- 1:30 pm Dr calls – son has tested positive for COVID (so has to quarantine until the 17th, daughter can go to school and out with mask always and no symptoms, we have to test every 3-5 days, I read recently that experts say should be 5 days to really catch tests)
- 2 pm I call Principal Adutwum. She immediately reports to DCPS and DC Health and the process starts for contact tracing and notifications etc.

9/9 Thurs

8:30 am I got a call from DCPS contact tracer. She just asked the timing of when Max has symptoms. She also gave me heads up about this rule which means likely no one will be a "close contact" because we saw the fever Monday, they would consider anything before Saturday NOT a close contact: *Based on the updated guidance from DC Health, a student in a school setting is considered a close contact if they are within 6 feet of an infected person for more than 15 minutes within a 24-hour window within 2 days prior to illness onset or positive test result.* <https://dcpsreopenstrong.com/health/#covid-19-reporting-protocols>. This aligns with CDC but is very much concerning to me. We know most times COVID takes 4-5 days to incubate (recently hearing 5 is best). Fevers can take 24-72 hours to show up. But only 2 days to prove a close contact? She ALSO said that she doesn't decide anything. "State" contact tracers will call me and they will decide what the close contact means etc. They have not contacted me yet.

9:50 am I send an email to Max's class because I felt ethically obligated to let people know. I learned: some people did get notifications individually to stay home until the 13th to quarantine because they were close contacts; there is some confusion about quarantine and siblings from parents (I can't answer that just sharing)

10:30 am PA sends email to community (below)

12:30 – as I write I still have not heard from state contact tracers though DCPS said I would.

I couldn't sleep last night because I feel an ethical obligation to share. So therefore my email to all of you. I have nothing to hide and feel that knowing is how we beat this thing ultimately.

My analysis:

- I appreciate that PA and AP Hoagland acted quickly as soon as I told them of the positive test (which was right after I heard from Doctor)
- We as a family have been as safe as we can for a year and a half without any exposures and the ONLY thing that changed in our lives is going to school. I traced all our steps and with the average incubation periods and all that, and the fact that he was negative Thursday but positive Monday means he was most likely incubating during last school week. And the only place that I can see him contracting is school given that was his only activity that week. I'm not blaming the school, I'm trying to understand to help keep others safe. That is the whole point. Transparency, communication = more people safe and healthy.
- There are a lot of parents across all schools going through the same thing. It is very hard for schools to implement all of the layering all the time (masks, distancing, air quality, etc) that is the best way to keep kids safe and so cracks open and the virus spreads
- It's unclear what DC Health/DCPS do to try to figure out how Max got it- what the contract tracing is PRIOR to him getting it. Is there an asymptomatic case in our school? Did it really come from school? I would work with the city in any way to try to figure this out to help others.
- Vaccines work (even though there are breakthroughs I know) because Max is the only unvaxed person in our family and so far the 3 of us are all negative. We will continue testing.
- While the CDC provides a floor I wish there were more safety measure in place above the floor and more resources for better implementation.
- It's unclear what quarantine learning means, I'm going to reach out to Max's teachers.
- I read that experts are saying the safest thing is to wait 5 days to test because that's more likely to show up if its there (5 days from exposure). So you can see why Max started school Monday would be negative Thursday (3.5 days) but positive Tuesday (over 5 days). That 5 day window also demonstrates that it was mostly likely contracted/exposed during those school days.
- There is still lots of confusion about who is in charge of contact tracing and what the difference is between DCPS contact tracing (which was super minimal) and the "state" tracing which has not contacted me yet but DCPS contact tracer said the process is that

they would contact me. But yet DCPS sent out this letter. So I'm really confused about the tracing process.

Parent to parent, I will tell you this has been the worst 4 days. I have been mostly crying having difficulty talking and for those of you that know me, you know that's not normal. The worry, the amount of communications I have had to do with the school/DCPS/health providers and research to keep him safe has disrupted work (in addition I can't focus on anything at work because I'm so worried), trying to manage a kid in quarantine is hard, the feeling of shame/failure as a parent despite trying to do all I could to protect him, anger at the system and govt, and exhaustion. And this is all with a kid who seems to be having a light reaction to the virus. I can't imagine how much worse it would be if it wasn't light.

I know there is no perfect tracing and we can't pinpoint exactly at this point but the odds are, given the timeline and the facts, that it was likely contracted at school. So please keep a look out and get tested if you feel any concern or see anything or just in case. You know sites are free all over DC.

I am not trying to alarm anyone, and I'm not trying to cause a stir on anything. I just ultimately come down on the side of transparency. We have to know all we can to beat this virus ultimately. I am an open book (but no expert just learning as I go). If you have any questions, please email me or text/call 202-744-4160. I feel so terrible for Max/us and anyone that was near him during school. Hoping for the best for all.

Thanks.

Danica

APPENDIX B

From: Cap Hill Montessori @ Logan <email@blackboard.com>

Sent: Thursday, September 9, 2021 10:31 AM

To: dpetrosius@yahoo.com

Subject: A Message from Principal Adutwum

A message from Cap Hill Montessori @ Logan

September 9, 2021

Dear Capitol Hill Montessori School,

This letter is to inform you that an individual who was last present at Capitol Hill Montessori on September 3 has since reported a positive test for coronavirus (COVID-19). The individual is no longer on campus and will not return until medically cleared.

As determined by the DCPS Contact Tracing team, DC Health, and in accordance with the district's COVID-19 health and safety guidance, unless you have received instructions directly, your student has not been identified as a close contact of the positive individual and does not need to be tested or self-quarantine.

Persons for whom we know were in close contact with the positive individual were notified and provided guidance on next steps, including how any students impacted would receive instruction during quarantine.

For your awareness, DC Health defines a close contact in a PK-12 setting as, "Someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 15 minutes over a 24-hour period, starting from two days before illness onset (or for asymptomatic infected people, two days prior to positive test collection) until the time the infected person is isolated."

Since DCPS has [layered mitigation measures](#) in place at our schools, students who were in a classroom and within 3 to 6 feet of another student who reported a positive test such that all were engaged in consistent and correct use of well-fitting face masks are not considered a close contact. This means that some classmates may not receive instructions to quarantine due to these measures. Additionally, upon notification of the positive case, and out of an abundance of caution, the building will be cleaned and disinfected, including classrooms, office areas, conference rooms, and other common areas.

We all play a role in protecting ourselves, our family, and our school community from COVID-19. That is why we encourage you to take the [Stronger & Safer Together Pledge](#) that includes everyday steps to stop the spread of COVID-19 and keep our community safe.

- Regardless of your vaccination status, if you are waiting for a COVID-19 test result that was taken after symptoms, please stay at home until you receive a negative test result.
- If you receive a positive test result OR are experiencing symptoms such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath — please stay at home and isolate from others in your household, notify your school immediately, and contact your healthcare provider.
- We highly encourage our students and families to get the COVID-19 vaccine. Visit vaccinate.dc.gov to get started and find a free school clinic near you.

I know that this has been a trying time for our community. We will continue to keep you informed about our health and safety measures and work together to ensure we have a strong, robust, and safe school year.

Thank you,

Kim Adutwum

Principal, Capitol Hill Montessori

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