

The Honorable Muriel Bowser Mayor
c/o Paul Kihn
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Washington, D.C. 20004

CC: Council of the District of Columbia, c/o Chairman Phil Mendelson, via email
pmendelson@dccouncil.us

Office of the State Superintendent of Education, c/o Acting Superintendent Christina Grant, via
email christina.grant@dc.gov

(INSERT DATE)

Dear Mayor Bowser, the D.C. Council, and OSSE Representatives,

We write to you as concerned citizens that see and have been impacted by the negative effects of COVID-19 on our children's education and development. As outlined by the DC State Board of Education, we acknowledge and appreciate the laborious work that has been done, amidst the global pandemic and crises, to strategize how best to provide schooling to our children over the past year and a half. This letter details insight into the guidance written by OSSE, concerns about this guidance particularly for students with disabilities and special healthcare needs, and recommendations about how best to provide hybrid and virtual school options for all families in the District. Our goal is to prioritize the health, safety, and long-term development of our children and families.

The State Board of Education encourages you to allow every Local Education Agency to offer a hybrid or fully virtual option for any family who requests it during the 2021-2022 school year. We stand by this recommendation, and emphasize that we urge Local Education Agencies to **expand virtual options beyond what is currently being offered to include high-risk and at-risk family members and cohabitators of students with medical exemptions**. The current OSSE guidelines do not allow for siblings of high-risk children or other family members to pursue a virtual learning option. The current requirement that students can only qualify for medical exemption if there is a direct medical necessity for that particular child to access the virtual option is insufficient and may have dire consequences. The requirement to enter the school building and attend in-personal schooling for students who are not granted medical exemption, but live with siblings and family members with complex medical needs, puts their family's health and safety at risk. The same applies for students who may be ineligible to receive the vaccination. Our children cannot be considered in isolation but as members of a family and larger community unit to which they belong and who they rely on for their stability. The traumatic impact of COVID-19 has impacted families, and Black and brown communities the hardest.

Per the strict OSSE requirement, doctors are only allowed to say that there is a direct medical necessity for that specific student that bars their attendance to in-person school. In order to protect families and students who live with someone with complex and vulnerable medical needs, **LEAs must offer a virtual option for any family that requests it.** The requirement for a medical exemption must change in order to include anyone who sees in person schooling as a risk to their families' and community's safety and health. As we have so clearly seen, COVID-19 and particularly the Delta variant spread incredibly quickly and easily. To require students to enter a school in order to receive their education is negating the severe consequences of contracting and spreading the virus to them and their loved ones. This in turn affects the development and long-term educational outcomes for any student who is not able to safely enter the school building. There must be another option for families – currently, families need to decide whether to risk truancy or risk contracting and spreading COVID-19, and this is unacceptable. In order to prioritize the health, safety, and education of all students in the District of Columbia, it is crucial that LEAs offer a hybrid and completely virtual option for any family that requests this method. It is also important to note that this request does not add an additional financial burden on schools, as they are required to provide some sort of hybrid model for students to access should they become unable to attend school for 10 days or more for reasons up to and including: quarantining for COVID-19 so as not to deny a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). This is not the first time you've heard this from this community. Please see the following letters: [SBOE Letter to Mayor Bowser on Reopening](#); [Washington Lawyers' Committee Concerns to DCPS and DC PCSB on Failure to Provide Educational Services to Quarantined Students](#); [Petition for Virtual Option](#); and [The Crumbling of DC Education and COVID-19 Petition](#).

Best,

(INSERT YOUR NAME)

(INSERT YOUR EMAIL)

(INSERT YOUR PHONE)