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***Reopening (Vaccines, Outdoors  
Ed, Next Year). Performance Oversight.  
School Budgets. Overcrowding.***

*Please circulate. Contact me at [ruth4schools@yahoo.com](mailto:ruth4schools@yahoo.com).*

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***Calendar:***

**Ward 3-Wilson Feeder Education Network: Mon March 8, 7pm**

The meeting will feature **Deputy Mayor for Education Paul Kihn**, who will update the group on ***reopening, school budgets, and overcrowding***.

The meeting will open with remarks from DME Kihn, followed by a Q and A session.

[Register for zoom meeting here](#). Once registered, you will receive a confirmation email with joining information.

*Future meetings for your calendar:*

Monday, April 5 – TBD

Monday, May 10 -- Council Chair Phil Mendelson

Monday, June 7 -- DC Education Research Collaborative

**State Board of Education Working Meeting: Wed, March 3, 5pm**

This monthly meeting of the Board will include presentation and questions from Board Member for ***DCPS Chancellor Ferebee***; a presentation on a new **survey of DC teachers** commissioned by the Board, on issues around the pandemic, early reading, teacher retention; and a **discussion of PARCC** testing. [To watch, click here](#).

**Decoding Dyslexia DC: Thurs, March 11, 7PM**

[Subscribe](#)[Past Issues](#)[Translate ▼](#)**Register here for March 11 meeting:**

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/decoding-dyslexia-dc-march-general-meeting-tickets-144066758553>

*The April meeting will feature psychologist Dr. Rachna Varia, co-founder of Mindwell Psychology. **For April, Register here:***

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/decoding-dyslexia-dc-march-meeting-featuring-dr-varia-tickets-144068933057>

Performance Oversight on Education Agencies: **March 9, 9AM-6PM**

The council conducts hears from **public witnesses about the performance of the District's education agencies**. See story below.

***Reopening #1******Teachers need vaccines! Please sign and circulate.***

*Sign the petition here.* Retweet about it [here](#).

Every family is not ready to send their children back to in-person school; every staff member is not comfortable in returning. But many more families and staff would be willing or happy to return if the Mayor and DCPS would provide a double vaccination to all teachers planning to return for Term 4 before term 4 begins (on April 17). That means starting in early March. ***Right now, teachers who plan to teach in term 4 are not being accepted for vaccines*** (Inaccurate information may be posted on the vaccine website, but we know from many cases that these teachers have not been allowed to sign up.) Please sign this petition to urge the Mayor and Chancellor to open up the vaccines quickly!

And, please--note to Mayor and Chancellor: Let's not play this game again, where we, in effect, taunt teachers by saying we'll give you the vaccine... but we'll only give you *one* before you go back to school.... The other will be after you've already been in school for several weeks. Why??!! This has been a hellacious year for families and staff. Can we not make it worse than it has to be?

Here's what I emailed Chancellor, Mayor, and others about vaccinations, in response to concerns expressed by parents and staff.

before term 4 begins. Please, let's be respectful and compassionate and provide two vaccines before requiring staff to return! Please let's set a time and publicize it now so staff and families can make plans.

(I also wrote: Please, if we're asking staff to simulcast, please make it easy for them to get needed cameras. And, tents please!!!! We were told at a public meeting that tents are easily available upon asking central office. Is that the case?")

## ***Reopening #2***

### ***The outdoors option--for Term 4 (and beyond)***

***In the last few days, the Chancellor has indicated that the district will not be urging schools to bring in more students or stepping up efforts to help schools that want to bring more students back. The lack of a vaccine priority for teachers is such an example. This is unfortunate, and I hope the Chancellor will take to heart the great interest in finding ways to bring more students and staff back safely.***

Meanwhile, this could be a moment for school communities to take the initiative to use outdoor learning as a way to gain extra space and to encourage health-conscious families and staff to return to school. DCPS has indicated some willingness to support schools that want to take greater advantage of outdoor space (for example, providing tents); and, its most recent budget overview, which calls for new funding for outdoor education and other innovations in the coming year, suggests a growing interest in it.

Since the fall, various organizations, including the State Board of Education have been urging DC's public schools to make greater use of the outdoors as a way to bring students back to school for either academic or social activities. For example, here is the [letter sent by the Board to the Mayor and the Chancellor](#) asking for more support for outdoors education. Here is our [unanimously adopted resolution](#).

If school communities are interested, principals should reach out to the Central Office via their Instructional Superintendents. For some ideas on issues to consider around outdoors education, as well as the names of partner organizations (such as [Urban Adventure Squad](#) and [Foodprints](#)), that can provide curriculum/activity support for modest costs, see this [planning guide](#) and this [FAQ](#). For advocacy ideas, [click here](#).

## ***Next School Year: Now's the time to plan.***

*Especially at the secondary level, I am hearing from parents, educators, and students that there are aspects of virtual education that deserve to survive the pandemic, and there are students for whom it has been an easier, more productive way of learning. Some greater use of virtual education should be with us to stay.*

But by next fall, it should be a priority to make it possible for all students who want to be back in school full time to do so. But I hear increasing chatter that planning for next next year is based on hybrid schedules. This is distressing.

It is certainly right that through the fall, students will likely need to stay in cohorts and be socially distanced--even if the precise rules around these rules can be liberalized as the pandemic subsides. Even if we hope that all will be fine by the fall and that schools can return to a traditional schedule, we could face variants or a fall surge. For those who are more optimistic that the pandemic will be gone and social distancing will join the ash heap: Even if we don't assume the worst, we absolutely need a Plan B. But none of this means that we need to be stuck with widespread hybrid learning into the fall!

### ***What it does mean:***

**---We need more staff and more space!** If students need to be socially distanced, most current classrooms won't fit the full number of students who are typically in an average class. And most schools in the Wilson feeder system, as well as many to most schools across the city, don't have extra room that they can use as classrooms.

**---The city and DCPS should be working now to identify additional space where classes can be held.** These could be tented classrooms--in school rec areas (if the school has room), on adjacent streets that have been closed down by the city, in parks that have been identified and set up for classroom space, in libraries, etc. The city could also lease space in commercial buildings, and it could work with partner organizations that have both space and educational activities (museums, arboretums, parks, etc.) or that offer such programs, such as "walking history" programs.

**---To staff these extra classes, we also need extra staff!** The stimulus funding that is expected to be available before the fall offers the real possibility of more staff and more space. With more staff and more space, we could also be serious about addressing the issues that next year's students will be bringing to school--the social/emotional effects of a year of isolation with few friends,

already behind are the ones that will have fallen further behind. ***Imagine the academic and social work that could be done with students in these smaller classes***, with each one that needed intensive tutoring being able to get it--either from their teacher who now has maybe a third fewer students or from a small staff of tutors hired by the school.

**But planning needs to start now.** I will be raising this with DCPS officials and DC Council members. I encourage you to do so as well. Speaking of which...

## ***Performance Oversight Hearing, March 9***

### **Upcoming: Performance Oversight hearing on the performance of our education agencies**

Each spring, the DC Council holds performance oversight hearings in which residents can raise concerns (and plaudits!) about city agencies overseen by the Council. **This year the hearing for public witnesses on our education agencies is March 9, 9AM-6PM.** This hearing is where the public can comment on the performance of our mayoral-control agencies—DC Public Schools, the Deputy Mayor of Education, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, and the Public Charter School Board—as well as the independent State Board of Education and the two independent offices housed within the Board, the Office of the Ombudsman and of the Chief Student Advocate.

**To testify, [sign up here](#):**

## ***Education/School Budgets***

We don't yet know what the mayor will be proposing in her city or education budget or how the DC Council will propose to modify it, though we do have this [initial report on how DCPS](#) is thinking about addressing students' special academic and socio-emotional needs this summer and fall. We do know that our schools will face special challenges next year and the budget must reflect that. Here's an initial [letter to the Mayor from the State Board of Education](#) about our hopes, including support for an increase to overall funding and at-risk funding, support for outdoor education, full funding of the "dyslexia" bill to address early reading difficulties, and support for enhanced efforts to deal with the learning loss and social-emotional issue that many

## ***School Budgets***

Schools have received their initial budgets. More to come on this, but from what I hear so far: It appears that many schools would have to cut staff in order to meet their budgets, either due to actual cuts or because any increases don't make up for increased costs. Principals and LSAT's are already at work trying to figure out how to address the cuts. This is very disheartening at the end of such a difficult year!

Moreover, it seems like a terrible waste of time and mental effort: Hopefully, well before the schoolyear begins, DC and hopefully DCPS will have received substantial funds from the federal government's stimulus and rescue package. The purpose of the education dollars in the American Rescue Act is to help schools weather the pandemic-related revenue shortfalls as well as to provide programming that will help schools deal with the continuing pandemic (see above!), learning loss, socio-emotional issues, and more. There must be a way that DCPS can give schools a pass on the cuts and encourage them to start now to plan in a more generous way for the fall and next year?

The budget process has been postponed a bit. Hopefully, the Mayor's proposed budget, now due to Council on x/x, will reflect the availability of the stimulus funds. Meanwhile, I hope DCPS and its schools can focus on planning for next year, not on identifying cuts.

For information on school budgets, see the new DCPS school budgets dashboard, with information on initial school

allocations. <https://dcpsbudget.com/dashboards/fy22-initial-allocations/>

## ***Funding for the "Addressing Dyslexia/Reading Difficulties***

As many of you know, the DC Council passed this legislation, aimed at preventing and treating dyslexia and address reading difficulties, last fall. The Mayor vetoed it, and the DC Council overrode the veto. Now the ball is back in the Mayor's court, as it's vital that she fully fund the bill in her proposed budget. As the mayor's administration develops its budget, now is the time to let the mayor know that we want to see the new legislation. Here is [background on the funding needs](#). Here is a [sample letter to the Mayor](#) prepared by Decoding DyslexiaDC, the organization that has been leading the advocacy for this law.

## ***DCPS names new W3/Wilson Feeder Schools Working Group to advise on best uses of two new***

*Of course, our schools have been struggling with overcrowding for many years. Four years ago, DCPS convened a Community Working Group that brought together stakeholders from across the Wilson High School Feeder Pattern to consider how to address the issue. [The group's final report](#), issued in early 2019 along with [the response issued at the time of the Ward 3/Wilson Feeder Schools Education Network](#) (6th down, see Letter on the Community Working Group), projected continuing overcrowding. The most recent enrollment projections from the Deputy Mayor of Education's office, forecasts enrollments in the Wilson feeder pattern that would mean a mean a need for thousands of additional seats within the feeder pattern. In response, the Mayor determined last year to build a new school on the grounds of the existing Old Hardy School (which now houses the Lab School) and, with enthusiastic community support, to purchase the suddenly available former elementary/middle school campus of the Georgetown Day School.*

Earlier this year, DCPS convened a Community Working Group, composed of community stakeholders, to advise DCPS about how best to use the two new buildings to relieve the overcrowding. The group is composed of one parent rep and the principal from each school in the feeder pattern, plus representatives from affected ANC's and community associations and the Ward3/Wilson Feeder Education Network (W3EN), CouncilMember Cheh's office and the State Board of Education reps from Ward 2 (Allister Chang) and Ward 3 (me).

DCPS's plan is to hold several planning meetings, followed by broader community engagement. [You can keep up with the group here](#), where DCPS will post notes from each meeting.

Meanwhile, earlier this year, overcrowding at Lafayette Elementary, on the other side of the Wilson Feeder area, almost meant the loss or dislocation of of their pre-k program. In the end, the immediate dislocation was stopped, and efforts to find a workable solution continue. [Here's the letter](#) that my Ward 4 SBOE colleague Frazier O'Leary and I wrote to the Chancellor and the Mayor about the situation, which also outlines a series of options for addressing the Lafayette situation. Special credit to ANC 3/4G and its chair, Randy Speck who helped negotiate a response to this situation. [See ANC resolution here](#).

### ***Keep in touch***

*As always, if you have thoughts on the above or other suggestions, feel free to email me, [ruth11@me.com](mailto:ruth11@me.com).*

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