

Michela English: So should you think we should get started, Laura? We can at least get through the minutes and everything?

Laura Maestas: Yeah, that sounds great.

Michela English: Okay. Okay. Well, welcome everyone. It's nice to see you virtually and I hope it is less wet and gloomy in the D.C. area than it is where I am. Is it the same, pretty much? I can see from Dan's face. Yes. Okay, so I guess there's no sun anywhere right now, but anyway, thank you for making the time for the board meeting and we'll just jump right in. I think the only thing we have to vote on is the minutes from the November meeting, which Laura included in our materials. So can I have a motion to approve those minutes?

Judy Lansing Kovler: Motion to approve.

Michela English: Okay Judy. Thank you. Is there a second?

Emily Lawson: Second.

Michela English: Okay, and any discussion or questions about the minutes? We're going to need to do a roll call vote, since this is an electronic meeting that's consistent with the Open Meetings Act. So I'm going to go in the order that I see people, so Patrick, I'll start with you.

Patrick Clowney: Yes.

Michela English: Okay. Thank you. Ahmad?

Ahmad Hajj: Yes.

Michela English: Okay. Hadley?

Hadley Cooper: Yes.

Michela English: Alright, thank you. Judy?

Judy Lansing Kovler: Yes.

Michela English: Okay. Collette?

Collette Bruce: Yes.

Michela English: Okay. Emily?

Emily Lawson: Yes.

Michela English: Maura?

Maura Marino: Yes.

Michela English: And I think that's everyone I see right now. Any opposed? So with that, the minutes are approved. Thank you. We will jump into our discussion of reopening, and I'm going to turn that over to Laura, but this is just an enormous topic as you all know for all schools. Phenomenally complicated from many, many different angles, and I think people also come at it from very different perspectives. And so we want to have a good, open discussion. There's really two reasons to do it. One is, Laura and her team have spent a lot of time agonizing over these decisions, thinking through options, talking about it, analyzing data, getting information from parents and families about what their preferences are. And I think it's really important that the board understand the issues they're grappling with and the thought process that they're going through, and I think Laura is also very interested in hearing everyone's input. I would say at the end of the day, as with any significant decisions, we're really here to advise her, but I feel strongly that as the CEO and head of the team here, this is her call as to how eventually we want to approach this. It could be that we don't all agree, and I do want to have an open discussion, but at the end of the day it will be the call for Laura and the team. So with that, let me turn it over to you, Laura.

Laura Maestas: Thanks, Michela. And I would say there is no perfect decision. Whatever decision we reach, it will be the wrong decision for some people. And that feels hard, because I know that we can't make everyone happy in this moment, because we are all grappling with such different criteria about what is right for us as individuals and as parents. So what I really want to do is make sure that we are grounding ourselves in our data about what our families are telling us, because we are responsible for delivering good results for our families. And we need to be thinking about, what are they asking us for? How are we bringing professional judgment about what is possible and what is not? And how are we building a case, if we believe that there is something more that we can offer, that could better meet needs over time. But I want to start by grounding us in our data, which says that more than 60 percent of our families now are saying that they are unsure, unlikely, or very unlikely to have their child attend school in person this spring, if we were to reopen schools. And that creates a complicated dynamic for us to think about, how can we continue to deliver good quality education for all of our families? And how are we laying the groundwork over time to move towards more and more in-person learning, given that we believe the conditions over the next few months, the next six to nine months in particular, will be--we all pray--dramatically different. So that's really the way in which we are thinking about this issue. As a senior team, we've discussed this extensively and we believe that the best path forward is our third option, which would be: begin the process of

reopening by launching small in-person programming on Wednesday afternoons this spring, and then use that to get our safety and health protocols as good as we can make them to get ready for a large in-person program for our summer school, and then as many students as possible in the fall. And in order to do that, we need to be convincing our staff and our families that we have the right plan in place to meet the needs both from a health and safety standpoint, but also from a social-emotional wellness and academic catch-up for the fall. And so that is the work that we are also doing in parallel over the course of this spring. And that's the work that our campus teams are planning for how we will engage families and staff in that discussion. So that's our recommendation and I want to use this time to answer questions and to hear your thoughts and advice as we navigate this.

Judy Lansing Kovler: I have a question about the vaccination of teachers. Are you finding that many of the teachers are willing or not willing to get vaccinated? Does that make a difference? I've heard that Children's [National Hospital] is going to be offering it starting this week, next week, or whatever, to all charter schools and teachers. What's happening with that? Does that make a difference in terms of all of this?

Laura Maestas: I would say our staff are in different places about whether they are ready and willing to take the vaccine or whether they have concerns about the vaccine. I would say that's something to figure out, but I would say the first priority is just being able to get access to the vaccine is still of concern. So we've been working closely with a number of people at the city and then also at the DC Alliance which has been trying to gather input from across the charter community to get access to the vaccine. And right now, the only people who are eligible to get the vaccine are people who are working in person and who are in-person serving students. And so we have a number of staff members right now who are working in person because they open our school buildings to provide meals and materials. We can still not get them vaccinated because we are not serving students in person.

Judy Lansing Kovler: So maybe I've heard the wrong information. I have heard the Children's Hospital was opening a clinic for all--it initially was all just DCPS teachers, but that it was now going to include charters as well. And that was supposed to open almost immediately. Does anyone know any more about that, or is that inaccurate?

Michela English: We can't hear you, Hadley.

Laura Maestas: Judy, you are right that they are providing vaccinations for educators both in DCPS and in the charter community, but the criteria right now is they're phasing in who's first in line, and who's first in line right now is dependent on: you have to be working in person right now and your school has to be serving students in person right now. Dan, Suraj, I know you guys have also been in these conversations. Is there anything that you would add to that?

Dan Englander: No, that's right. I would just say, the Children's [National Hospital] distribution is specifically DCPS staff. One Medical is operating the charter school distribution. In either case what Laura said is true: today, the folks who are eligible are only teachers who have students in person.

Maura Marino: And Laura, I don't think you said this: Children's [National Hospital] is only planning to do this for a couple weeks with just DCPS and then One Medical is doing the charter teacher vaccines, and they'll probably be a long-term partner of the city on vaccinations.

Laura Maestas: Maura, is there anything that you would add about the number of vaccines relative to the degree of need?

Maura Marino: I think you summarized it well. The demand just so far outpaces the supply. There's about 4,000 or 5,000 vaccinations a week right now that can go towards anyone who's a teacher, an essential worker, a police officer. And you know, there's 20,000 staff members just in schools that need to be vaccinated, and so the city, as Laura you said so well, is just trying to manage this tension. And that's why it's going to go first to staff who are in person with kids virtually every day before it can go to other school and staff members.

Patrick Clowney: So I guess the assumption is that our children have to get vaccinated every year, and there's a host of vaccines that they have to have before they enter. Do we know, if children are being allowed back to school, I guess COVID-19 [vaccine] will not be a requirement? Or do we know if we foresee the COVID-19 vaccine as a requirement going forward with DCPS, for students? Not teachers, but specifically for students. Is it going to be on that mandatory list for the ones that you have to have?

Dan Englander: I think it's too early to say for sure because it hasn't been authorized for kids. I think it wouldn't be crazy to think it would be at some point. But I think just based on both the authorization and the rate of vaccination, I can't imagine that being something that would be a requirement for this coming fall as right now.

Patrick Clowney: And we don't think that the city will mandate it for teachers. Is that probably a correct assumption also?

Dan Englander: That would be my assumption, but others who are more plugged into policy could weigh in. I will add to Laura's point about our vaccination, both for staff and for families, was relatively low on the list of factors that family said were driving their decision about whether or not they wanted to return in person. Now that may be different for our staff, but from a family perspective, generally what we heard is that there were things that were more important to them than the vaccination availability.

Ahmad Hajj: Then I was going to ask that question. What are the main drivers behind the families not wanting to go back? Or Laura or whoever can answer that question.

Laura Maestas: I think it's a host of things. I would say for some it is concern about the way in which COVID-19 could impact their family if their child gets sick and gets other members of the household sick. That is a concern. Others are concerned about...I think that's the primary thing that we hear from families, is fear of the health risks that it poses to their family. But others on the team should weigh in and we have Patrick, Nicole--if you have things that you would add for families that that you are in contact with, I would encourage you to also share that.

Nicole Davy: I just think, for families that I've heard from, it's really just the numbers currently. They just don't feel like it's safe to return at this point. And that's not everyone, but that's some of the feedback I've heard.

Ahmad Hajj: Do the families have access, through DC Prep, to information about how schools that have opened both in the fall and even before, have done and how low the transmission rates have been at school? Or is it just simply they're seeing what they see on the news and they presume that it's very dangerous? Because I think schools, in young children, the effect is much less than it is in the overall population, including transmittal back at home. It's just something that may inform them a little bit more. It may potentially change some of their minds. I think option three seems reasonable, because you guys are getting the kids back in school who either want to be there and have small groups of them. But my concern is that the information is not perfect, and it's kind of just the headlines we're seeing on the news, but if you actually break it down a little bit and understand that school is not a big place where it's transmitted. And I really do worry for these kids not being in school.

Patrick Clowney: My personal opinion was option one. Now, I'm a data point of one. And for me, my calculus was, you get to go back in the summer, so you start having those touchpoints, but also--and I know that the other options would start essentially almost nine weeks from now, so we'd be talking about a May-ish timeframe, right? So the longer we go before we start, I think the safer it becomes. And for me when I say safer, because I think the infection rates will continue to go down as more people follow rules and guidance, but at the same time, more people in society are going to be getting vaccinated, right? So you're going to have more people that are getting vaccinated over this period of time. You're also going to get more people taking those precautions. So I think the combination of those two things will drive down the likelihood that people will get it and that it will spread. For me, I liked option one because I go well, you still do some touchpoints, but it still draws it out a little bit more. It allows those numbers to continue to fall down. Safety is very important to me. And I trust me, I get it: my kids want to go back to school. You know, my eight-year old was just telling me, school is not fun at home. I want to go back to school. This is just not fun anymore. Right? So yeah, I get it. But at the same time, and when you talk about parents, you have to think that a lot of our students either live

with their grandparents or they socialize with their grandparents right after school. So, you talk about that child going there, despite the fact that it's a small possibility, they could still get it, then they take it home and give it to a grandparent, and a grandparent could potentially get into some serious trouble. So for me, it was more the delay, but like I said, the longer it is, we get a lot safer, the less likely that we'll have some transmission. I also thought that another big piece is just the safety at the school and what are the additional health precautions that we're going to take, and whatever that detailed plan is going to be, it's going to be important to relay to parents. I think Laura and I were talking about this yesterday on another call, and it was interesting--I was watching the local news tonight, and Ferebee was on there, and he was talking about how they're going to have these filters in the classroom, and I got air purifiers in every room in my house, right, because I'm the panicky one. But, of course, there are HVAC systems that are out there. People are trying to sell you things that cost a couple of thousand dollars, "this is the top-of-the-line plasma system that kills everything." So I just think from a parent's standpoint, you want to know that the school is doing everything they can to keep their child safe first and foremost. So that's why personally those were my reasons; when I looked at the options, I preferred option one because safety was a little bit more of a high priority for me than getting the kids back with those touchpoints, and I thought that by even doing something in the summer, you start hitting those touchpoints again and start making up a lot of what has been missed from the classroom environment.

Laura Maestas: Yeah, and I think--oh, go ahead.

Hadley Cooper: Sorry, it's Hadley. I'm having the worst technology day. And I apologize. I just have two questions. One, when you were putting forth your case in the fall for reopening, you got a lot of pushback from the teachers. Do you think that with option one, two, or three, that you'll have that you have them behind you? Or are you convincing both the families and the teachers? It's one question. And the second one is, do we have a sense of how far behind the students have fallen in this particular year since last spring?

Laura Maestas: Yeah, so both great questions. There is a lot of work to do to help staff understand, how will we handle the inevitable? What are all of the things that we need to do differently when we come back in person? Because whether that is in May, whether that is in July, whether that is in August, we are all going to need to behave in different ways, and teachers want to understand what all that will look like. We have some teachers who I think would be willing to come now and support with option three. I think we have fewer who would be willing to come for option two, and we would have some teachers who were annoyed with us if we went with option one, right? There's no answer where people are going to say, right on, DC Prep, you got this one! Because we're all different. And so we view risks differently, and we think about what is most risky to our students and to us in different ways. And so I am making peace with the fact that not everybody is going to love our answer, but we need to figure out how to do the most good for the most members of our community. And so that's why

I think with option three, we're trying to create a scenario where families don't have to experience significant Interruption. Because with three, we can basically keep our virtual program intact. And so if you don't want your child to come in person, they don't have to and you're still going to be able to have access to the same teachers, the same kind of depth of programming that you have today. And I think for many of our families they say, look, I may want my child to come in person eventually, but I'm happy enough with the way that it is, since I know that they're getting what they're getting now and they're safe. We have other families who are saying, my child needs something different, and so three is an attempt to try to give families more of what they need at least in small amounts.

Hadley Cooper: Okay, one last question. I'm sorry. What if COVID-19 doesn't go away? And I don't think it is. Is there a time at which we're all gonna just have to live with this? Because when I keep reading about the variants and all this stuff, and I've read a lot of studies, and Duke did a really interesting one where there was actually, in 90,000 students last fall, not one case of transmission from child to adult within a school setting. I think it was Ahmad who said, have we looked at the places? Because I feel that our students are being penalized for living in Washington, because a lot of the country's back at school. Is there a point at which people are going to throw up their hands and just go back to school? Because I think this will be with us for a very long time.

Laura Maestas: I think you're right to say that we need to be realistic.

Hadley Cooper: Yeah. Can you sustain the virtual and in-person for the next couple of years?

Laura Maestas: I think the answer is no. I don't think we can. But I also think that the work that we need to be doing over the next six months is saying, okay, if we believe that the best way for us to be able to educate children is in person, then we need to do the work of trying to say, here all of the ways in which our in-person program is going to be safe. So I think we're relying on one, the things that Patrick was saying, with vaccinations, with--hopefully, if there's a national plan for "these are the things that we need to do," there can be more alignment around people taking the right steps to keep all of us safe. And then if we ramp up vaccinations, that should help. I don't think that COVID-19 will go away, but I am hopeful that we will get to the point where transmission levels are at more manageable levels. In parallel, I think what we need to be doing is we need to be working more closely with community organizations that are experts in this area. And so we just had--Suraj, can you look up the name of the group that Danielle attended today? There's a group that is specifically working within Ward 7 and 8 in order to get more families more access to information about the vaccine, for example, because I think there's lots of places where different people have questions and concerns that they don't always feel like they have answers to, and I think the more that we are doing the work of helping families see: these are the safety measures that help keep kids safe within school, come and walk through our school buildings. Let's show you what it would be like. I think those are some of

the comments that I saw in our survey that I felt like we would actually be able to address if we were moving on a timeline that allowed us to slow down and invest in families to say, you have questions about what drop-off is going to look like, and if we're just going to take your kids temperature, everything will be fine, right? Families are saying that's not enough, and we agree that that's not enough. But we need to actually let families ask more questions and engage with them in a different way to then build their confidence that this can happen safely. I also think the more that we're actually operating in person and saying, we're having kids come into the building, it's going well, this is what happens if there is a case, this is how we handle it. You're going to know about it. We're not going to sweep it under the rug. Those are the types of things that I think will build confidence to hopefully get us to the point where, in the fall, we have many more kids in person. And I think we also need to do the work of, first, for ourselves to say, how are we going to handle it in the fall? If we were able to get 90 percent of our students in person, what are we going to do about the 10 percent of kids who whose families want them to remain virtual, and can we realistically continue to provide the same quality of virtual learning experience, you know, and how can we make sure that we're up front with families if we can't, so that way they're also making the decisions for themselves about what the right environment is for their child. I'm betting on the fact that we will be able to operate in person safely, and I'm acknowledging that there may be some families throughout this who decide permanently that they want their child to move into virtual learning right? I think that's not outside of the realm of possibility. But then like we're not the right school for them.

Ahmad Hajj: So Laura, I don't think you can make your decisions based on that 10 percent. In my estimation, and that's why option three seems to make sense, you've got to get kids back on campus. And I think once our parents, as you said, see it successfully work, that's going to be the most effective thing. Because you can send them--I'm glad Hadley brought up that point about the Duke study, and that does make sense that transmission doesn't happen--but unless you rip the Band-Aid off and get kids back in there, I think there's always going to be excuses. I mean look, this is not going to be perfect. COVID-19 is not going to go away. So you're going to have people just keep saying, well, there's one variant and I'm worried about that. Well, if that's going to be the perspective, then you guys are never going to open up again. It sounds harsh. But the reality is, you've got to get some kids back. It sounds like option three makes sense. I would even go more aggressively. I would let all the kids come back whose parents want to let them come back. But something has to happen, because--

Laura Maestas: There's no way to actually do that. So one of the things that's really tricky about the way in which our staffing model works is we can't open schools for 30 percent of our students without decimating our virtual learning program. And so that doesn't feel like the right answer given where the bulk of our families are at this moment in time. Because I have an obligation to meet the needs of as many of our families as I can, and if I take 30 percent of my staff away, then my virtual learning program falls apart.

Jenny Abramson: So Laura, can I just throw out one question?

Laura Maestas: Yep.

Jenny Abramson: So, two parts. One, you said it's 70 percent you think that would stay home?

Laura Maestas: That's our best guess.

Jenny Abramson: When did you most recently survey parents?

Laura Maestas: It closed over the weekend.

Jenny Abramson: Okay, and so the data based on what's come back so far is about 70 percent would stay home?

Laura Maestas: Yes. 35 percent of our families say they are likely or very likely to send their children in person, if--and the caveat was--assuming community transmission levels are at or below where they were in the early fall, and vaccine roll out for adults as well underway.

Jenny Abramson: So I think I guess my question to you--sorry to interrupt--is if you knew this was going to be the new normal, how would you change your staffing model to allow 30 percent, or whatever it is, to come back and not totally mess up learning for the kids at home? And I only bring this up because GDS [Georgetown Day School], when we had the same situation, the staffing model didn't work there either, the way it was done. And so we actually had to literally completely change the entire staffing model to allow some subset to come back and everyone else to be home. And so I'm curious--not that you do this immediately--but if you thought this was going to be the next year, you might say, I'm going to literally reinvent staffing. How might you do that, and if you don't know right now, is that something that you feel like you and the team would want to figure out to have that as an option, you know over the next month, to put together?

Laura Maestas: Yeah. It's a super smart question and I think we definitely need to rethink how we are staffing, because I think we're going to have to redesign our virtual program for the fall. I anticipate because of this issue and/or because more of our families want to be in person, but they're still kind of a group of families who want to be virtual. I don't have an answer for you today. But it's a smart question and one that we are thinking about.

Michela English: My personal feeling is it is inevitable. We're going to have to do some form of both, at least for a while. Hopefully not indefinitely into the future. And I just wanted to follow on with the point Hadley made earlier, about, you know, are our kids being penalized because they're in Washington? I think we're going to see as DCPS opens up, assuming the union doesn't

prohibit them from doing that, but if they stay on the course they say they're on now and they partially open, I think it could be a mixed quality, but that will be a bellwether for other teachers and for charters and my guess is by late spring anyway, there will be a significant number of charters who at least have some of their kids back in person. And as Ahmad said earlier, I think as more families see others who are going in person, they will gradually get more comfortable. And that's one of the things that I find attractive about option three. I would be concerned, I think, if we didn't do anything, before summer or before early fall, to get them back in person, because I think we would probably end up being an outlier. And I think that probably would not serve us well long-term. The other thing about option three is that I think it's intentionally a strategy that allows us to learn. So it's very hard to experiment in anything in education because of the way school is structured, but I think we'll build our own confidence, as well as our staff's confidence and family confidence, by starting small and seeing what we can do that really works. I think we'll probably be in much better shape going into summer school in the fall.

Ahmad Hajj: I agree. Can you guys remind me--I'm sorry--are there any DC Prep parents on this call right now?

Michela English: Patrick, and if Nicole is still there.

Ahmad Hajj: I'd like to hear--and I heard Patrick's point of view, and I appreciate that, and I understand being concerned. Nicole, what do you think?

Nicole Davy: I like option three. I think it gives a school a chance to just get everything right, having a smaller set of students instead of everyone going in at once. And we can come up with all types of plans, but we don't know until they're implemented if they're really working. So I kind of feel everyone going back at once in the fall doesn't give a lot of room for error. So I like the idea of a small number of students returning first, and just getting everything down. So when the fall comes, and the entire population is back, you'll have your policies and procedures and everything down at that point. And I agree with, you know, once it's normalized again that kids are going back to school, I think it will give confidence to other parents to send their children back as well. One thing that we just have to remember is, the community that we're serving, there's lots of things out there. I don't want to say conspiracy theories or things of that nature, but there's just a lack of education in some regard. And we can't forget that. And I think that's why a lot of parents are hesitant. They just don't have the education or the knowledge or the data hasn't been presented. It's kind of hard to change people's minds when it's made up about certain things. But you know, it hasn't always, our communities not always trusting in vaccinations and things of that nature. So that's just something I think we're forgetting. I think a lot of it is because of not trusting government, not trusting medicine and things of that nature, so we can't forget that. I think that's a cause for a lot of people not wanting to send their children back.

Ahmad Hajj: Nicole, will you send your children back?

Nicole Davy: Yes, I would. I'm in the medical field. I've already gotten vaccinated. You know what I mean? For me, it's a little bit different. Not everyone trusts the science like I do, but yeah, I would definitely send my kids back.

Judy Lansing Kovler: So this issue of trying to convince people to listen to science and to kind of trust people--that's a big issue. Between now and the fall, should we be doing any education? Other people that people would listen to--I mean, influencers of sort, that people would trust in the school community to come in and talk about, we're not just sending kids back to school because it's been a long time. We're sending them back because we've learned ways for them to be safe. And you know, other schools have done this and this study that Hadley just mentioned, or whatever studies are there, or other schools in the city, that have been successful because they've instituted certain things. So, how could we help people understand? I don't know if you have any thoughts about who could talk to people, who could give them information, who would people trust and how can we get them to trust that we have approaches and ways to make it safe not just because it's time and we're getting tired of it.

Laura Maestas: Yeah, that is I think that's a great question. We had someone who went to a meeting today. We were trying to get connected with the Leadership Council for Healthy Communities and the Black Coalition against COVID-19. So those are both two community groups where it's medical professionals who are working with leaders in the faith community and with health advocacy groups in Wards 7 and 8. Because I think we have a role to play, but what I think we also need to do is make sure that we are creating platforms and amplifying the message of the people who do this work of getting the right medical information to Wards 7 and 8 in particular. And so we're trying to understand how we can plug in and support those efforts. I'm sure that there's other work that needs to happen as well. Maura, do you want to talk a little bit about the work that the city is planning? Because this is a question that we've been asking to city leaders as well, because yes, we need to do work within our community because relationships matter, but also there needs to also be a consistent message coming from the city and the national government to help people feel like DC Prep is not just like making stuff up on our own.

Maura Marino: Yeah, DC Health is in charge of a public health communications campaign related to the vaccine. They have repeatedly said that they will have a school-focused component of that campaign, meaning it will be about who the right validators are for staff as they're making their decisions about vaccinations and eventually when the vaccine is available for kids. They'll be thinking about how families would make that decision for their own children and who might be important messengers on that. I think the problem is that DC Health has a thousand things they're trying to do. It's not just schools. And this is really not their priority right now. So there haven't been any details about when that campaign would happen,

how much it would be, how much of their public health messaging will focus on school communities. In the meantime, OSSE is trying to step into the breach. And Laura--this is actually late breaking news--Shana called me at 5 to say that they want to move ahead with a relatively light-touch way to support LEAs. But basically they want to create a speaker's bureau of groups like the Black Coalition against COVID-19 and public health experts--Lee Beers, who's the head of the American Association of Pediatrics, has offered to help--to get those kinds of speakers essentially sourced and then made available to schools and childcare providers, so that you could do targeted webinars for your school community. And then there would be kind of a toolkit for LEA leaders on talking to your staff about vaccinations. That would complement what DC Health has already put out for a more general audience. So they're hoping to stand that up in the next few weeks and they've asked us to fund that, which I think we'll be able to do. What I talked to Shana about--Shana's the interim state superintendent, for those of you who don't know her--was what else LEA leaders might need. Because I think you're hearing it in this conversation that the speaker's bureau is a helpful thing. I don't think it's enough for the magnitude of this need, but I think it is a helpful step in just getting messengers out who are affected by school staff and making these decisions.

Hadley Cooper: I have one question--sorry, it's Hadley again--from the way I read the mayor's orders, you can't have more than 12; unless there are two teachers, you can then have 13 people in a classroom. Does that still stand? And if that's the case, I do think it's a real stumbling block for everybody, considering our class sizes are higher. And I would argue that the mayor's just opened up indoor dining at 25 percent without masks and churches at 50. So Is there any way we can get that changed?

Maura Marino: I talked to the Mayor's office a bit about that, so I'm happy to answer this one, but Laura, you should jump in. They've been pretty clear that DC Health is not going to change that guidance anytime soon. And DC Health has already changed it once upward after a lot of pressure from DCPS. I think it might change as health conditions change, but given that where the cases are now, I don't think DC Health has a reason to do it, and I don't think the Deputy Mayor for Education's office or DCPS or others would feel comfortable pressuring them on that. So I think it's going to be a while before that changes, if at all. That seems to be kind of a hard-and-fast number right now.

Hadley Cooper: But isn't it strange that we can't have 20 kids in a classroom, but we can have 50 people in a restaurant? I mean, we're talking about health.

Maura Marino: Yes, but you know, there's just broader forces at work in terms of how the mayor's making decisions about small businesses versus schools, and I think that's what it is, unfortunately.

Hadley Cooper: Okay. Thank you. Sorry.

Patrick Clowney: I was just going to say I think probably the most important thing for parents is the safety protocols, right? So I think when we talk about whatever this robust communication plan is going to be, I just think it has to be rooted in the data and the science and also the protocol. So as a parent, I want to know that my child coming to school is going to be safe. I want to know that the protocols that you're following and that you've put in place are based in science and fact, because then it lends credence to what you're saying. And then--and I know the communication plan to get that out is, I know that that just needs a lot of thought in how we go about doing that, to make sure that it resonates with the intended audience, and what's the best way to do that? My best friend flies for Delta, right? So he gets tested every week. Delta's protocol is that you get tested every week. So he gets tested every week, and he goes, 'Patrick, the airplane is the safest place in America. We scrub these planes so much,' they clean them after every flight, and he's telling me the chemicals they're using and all of that stuff and filters that they have on the aircraft. Their protocol is, we clean aircraft after every flight, here the chemicals that we're using, we test our pilots weekly. If they test positive, then they're down for 10 days. So what are those protocols and things? So it makes you feel safe if you're going to go get on Delta's airline because they have these protocols that are in place that they're following. You wear a mask, and for Delta they still leave the center seat open. How do you take that dynamic or those protocols and go, 'These are the protocols that we're going to have in our classrooms. Here are the protocols we're going to have in the schools, and it's rooted in fact. If we're going to sit the kids six feet or eight feet apart, we're doing this because CDC guidance says that. Oh, by the way, here are all of these studies that kids have been going to school for you know several months now. And the transmission rate is low.' So those are just some more of my thoughts.

Laura Maestas: I agree with you wholeheartedly. People just need to touch and feel the policies. I think where we have been wrestling is figuring out--we've shared, we did a lot of work, particularly over the summer and then again in the fall, to build these policies. We had them vetted externally twice by people with medical, science backgrounds, and we're still not totally getting through to our staff. And so we think it highlights an opportunity for us to think differently about how we are engaging our staff to really feel like they understand all of those protocols to your point. And I think having them are the best ambassadors--Nicole, you and I had a conversation at one point, right? We were talking about the importance of, parents don't know me, they know their teacher. And they know the teacher who two of their children have had now. There's just people that they trust. And so we need to figure out how we are also doing a better job of getting our staff ready to be ambassadors for us, because they are the ones who I think are ultimately going to be the most compelling to our families. Suraj, Neils, Dan, would you guys add anything to that?

Ahmad Hajj: Laura, real quick, I'm looking at option three again. How many people do you expect to be in person in these small groups?

Laura Maestas: I would love to be able to venture a guess. I have no idea. We have been talking--we met with our principals and our ops managers earlier today. I think so much of it is going to depend on the enthusiasm with which they endorse the plan--I think will be part of it. I also think part of it will be a question of, what happens over the next two months? Because if it is the case that you know any teacher who wants to go and get vaccinated is able to go and get vaccinated, they may feel very differently than if they still feel like nobody can get vaccinated. I think that there are things that are within our control and there are things that are outside of our control, and the combination of the two means like I don't feel like I have a great sense of how many teachers will opt in. I can say, I feel what I told our principals and our ops managers is like if we are doing three like we are doing it and we are going to work our tails off to figure out how we get teachers to say that they're willing to do this. And then I think the questions will be for families: one, do they believe that it's safe? Two, do they believe that it's convenient? Three, do they believe that bringing their child in for whatever it is that's offered to their child is worth it. They're all still questions. Others on the DC Prep team, if you have additional thoughts, would encourage you to share.

Ahmad Hajj: Just real quick--I would say very high level, I think Patrick made a great point about the families and maybe the teachers understanding the risk. Everyone was scared of flying at the beginning of COVID-19. Then information came out that the chances of you getting COVID-19 on a plane was one in 7,400 if you're wearing a mask. So, that information is essential. So, Hadley made a point about this one study--if that information can get out, Laura, on a very high level, to say look, the transmission rate at schools is 0.2 percent. Whatever that number is. And then contact, if you can, the families and the teachers that are willing to go back, like Nicole or the other families, and get a real idea of who's willing to come. Because once the momentum starts, I think more families will come back. And I do think it's important to do this, if you can, in the spring, because if you wait until fall, then there's going to be excuses then as well. And I say it respectfully, I do think the momentum needs to start now. Maybe I'm being overly optimistic. I think things are going to get better. We have families on here. My kids have been at school--not as much as I wanted to, but they've been at school, and it's been safe. And I know I have friends in Florida that send their kids to public school there. There are kids that have been in school the whole time and it's been safe. So I think this is important to get those points and get kids back, even in small groups, because then it will get bigger. So that's the last time I'll say it. That's my point.

Michela English: Anybody else who has not weighed in on this yet who would like to make a comment or observation or has a question?

Nicole Davy: I just think that we have to remember and just be mindful about getting students that will be in person. We just have to remember staffing as well. Suppose there's more students who are willing to go in, but the staff are not comfortable going in. Are you going to now

penalize them for not going in? Are you going to tell them that you don't have a choice? So those are just things that I'm thinking of that would be a barrier for us to go ahead and go full-fledged. You know what I mean? You have to have the support of the staff. Because if you don't have the support of the staff, it's not going to be successful. So I just think that maybe the first step, you need to get the staff all on the same page. You know what I mean? I think that has to be the first step because if the staff is not in place, it just can't be done.

Jenny Abramson: I'll just say, Laura, I'm sure you're doing this, but since lots and lots of people have figured out both how to staff it, how to do it. I would just sort of encourage us to make sure someone is doing analysis. Or maybe it's more a "you already have it" of all the ways to manage this. And I think one of the things that I wonder out of this is, is there a fundraising opportunity around proctors, and people who are getting tested who come in so that the staff is primarily virtual, both if you end up in a situation where more families want to come back than teachers, *and* so that you have teachers who can teach across cohorts or groups. Might there be a way to get a grant for a year of extra staff that aren't the teachers but are there to sort of monitor and be in the rooms, if that makes sense? So just throwing that out. I don't know if you've already looked into that.

Laura Maestas: Yeah, it's a great question. I would say as we think about our planning for next year, we should certainly be thinking about the extent to which we're able to figure out a bridge solution that would involve different staffing configurations. I think the question for us always is who we put in front of our kids is so important, and so we're always thinking about, when do we need to hire them to be able to train them, to then supervise them? It's just a cascade, and so I think it's particularly relevant as we think ahead, and more challenging in the immediate term.

Judy Lansing Kovler: The more I hear you speak, Laura, it sounds like an interesting idea to use proctors and other things, and certainly something really worth exploring, but I don't know if I'd feel comfortable sending my child to a school if the teacher didn't feel comfortable. So I do think even with all the science base, you have to get the teachers on board, and is there any way that they could be talked into--who could talk to them that would make them feel comfortable with it? Because if the teachers don't feel comfortable, I don't think you have a chance of any families feeling comfortable. So how can we educate the teachers that they'll be safe? And you know, even though that's been a long time since they've been in the classroom, there are other schools and there's other teachers that they could even talk to, who maybe were scared at first but now months later they're really doing fine with it.

Laura Maestas: Yeah, I think you and Nicole I think are making exactly the point that we agree with, which is that we need our staff to say yes, not because we are forcing them, but because they believe it's like the right thing to do. That it's the right thing for kids. It's the right thing for them. And so what we've already said is, we're not going to force you back into classrooms this year. So we have to convince them that is a decision that they want to make for themselves.

Because I just can't see it being good for us as an organization--that's not the way to like lead people, to--

Jenny Abramson: I just want to push back for a minute, which is to say, I hear you, and I know it's not something that naturally feels comfortable, but people are doing it all over the country. And I think there is something different about--sometimes for health risk for teachers than for some students, and more I think of it as an equity issue, which is, there's childcare involved. And for some families, not having the option to send their kids someplace is a huge burden as people start opening up work again. And I think right now it's been more okay, because unless you're a frontline worker, a lot of people have been able to stay home. I think as the vaccine rolls out, there could be a world in which people are forced to go back to work and have no options for their kids. And then it starts to feel like, to me, more important to create an option, even if it's suboptimal, that people don't have to pick. That if you can't get teachers there, then you have a plan B to create it. I just think there's an equity issue here that is beyond--it may not be optimal, but to wait for the teachers may also not be optimal.

Laura Maestas: I hear you, and I think our basic message has been: one, this year, we don't believe that forcing people back in person is the right answer. We also believe that we as an organization are most effective in person. And we believe that the conditions will be right to be able to do that over the summer and into the fall. And so we're trying to set the expectation now that we will be in person in the fall. We are trying to start slowly piloting things to the point that Nicole was making earlier about building the muscle to get really good at the health and safety protocols this spring, and trying to start with the people who are willing to do it, to then be able to demonstrate that this can happen safely. We are going to do right by people and, in the fall, this is who we are, so this is what we're going to do. And we need to be ready to do that. So I don't disagree with you, Jenny. I think it's just a question of point in time, because right now, if I said, we are going to be back in person right now, I don't think I have like the family demand to be able to make that case in a way that will resonate with our staff, particularly because we have so many parents who are still saying, I want my child to be virtual or, I don't know yet whether or not I want to be in person.

Jenny Abramson: I hear you. I hear you. I'm really talking about sort of late spring, which is when I think it gets more complicated for families who have to be at work, but I hear you.

Patrick Clowney: I was just going to add--I put something in the chat in preparation for this because I was trying to think about data--are there hard points, and just to kind of see where D.C. was. It was the COVID-19 CDC [data], and I put Maryland, Virginia, and D.C. in there, just because I was like, 'Okay, if infection rates is a data point that we would want to consider, well, how are we doing in D.C., and how are we comparing it to others and states that are open and stuff like that.' You can select different states on there, so I'm going to go back and add Florida. You can put up the six different states. It would be interesting to see what their infection rate is,

and if it's higher than what ours is, and they're open, you know, there may be a good data point for consideration.

Hadley Cooper: I think D.C. has one of the lowest, besides maybe Maine and Wyoming. We are still sort of hovering around five. Maryland, I think, is at 11. Georgia, Florida, they're all much higher. So if that helps, absolutely, that is the case.

Laura Maestas: This is an important conversation and we should spend as much time on it as we need to. I also just want to do a time check because it's 6:20 now, and so I'm just going to ask Michela, what you want to do at this point?

Michela English: No, that's fine. You beat me to it. I was just going to try to wrap this up. I think if anybody has something, a point that they really want to make or another question that they really need to ask, please do it. But otherwise we'll move on, and I think it's been a very good discussion. Thank you all for leaning in. It's good. Anybody else on this? Okay. Okay, then we'll move on to the AMC update. Dan and Neils?

Dan Englander: Thanks, Michela. I'll provide a quick voiceover because there's been some changes, some updates since we sent out the board notes. So I'll give a quick update and then open for comments or questions. So as you all know, we have a two-year lease for AMC in a temporary space at the Birney Building, and we intend to move those kids into Wilkinson for a start in fall of 2022. We're working on a few different fronts to make that happen: financing for the construction, the design and management of that construction, Neils is working on community and public relations and then securing a lease from the D.C. government. Obviously we need all four of those to go right for this to be a success. And right now, I think we can say three are going well, or at least okay, and there's one of those that is presenting a bit of a roadblock. The ones that are going fine: financing is going fine; we've talked with a number of banks already. They all think this is financeable. They're not foreseeing problems with this. Management of the construction project is going fine. We have vendors on board. We have an owner's representative who's been working out our behalf, Jair Lynch. Community and public relations: Neils can correct as he sees fit, but it's also going fine. We continue to have some support. We don't have a strong visible opposition as we did at Frankfurt--yet. The place where we've hit some roadblocks is our work with the D.C. government in securing a lease. We've been working with DGS, the Department of General Services, on this Wilkinson lease since last summer, and we've always known there'd be some hiccups, I guess we could say, some challenges, because you know, we've heard from other schools and we've had experience with DGS as kind of slowness or bureaucracy, and that's what we've communicated to the board the last few times we've met: that DGS is working with us in good faith, but it's going slowly. As of the last week or so, we now feel like we're potentially facing a more significant roadblock from DGS. In short, they've changed their position on what part of the standard district disposition regulations the mayor exempted us from with the Budget Support Act and the timeline in

which would be able to resolve that. It's not a new topic. We've been talking to them about this point since August, but the answer is they've been giving us between August and now have suddenly changed, which would put at risk our ability to open in fall of '22. It's hard for me to say that DGS isn't acting in good faith. I think it's more that they seem critically unable to actually execute on their plans in a way that's sort of having the same impact as if they weren't acting in good faith. So Laura has been engaging with Paul, the Deputy Mayor, on this, and he, I think, has been pushing hard on our behalf. And so I still feel like we have some hope that this can be resolved and we'll be back on track and in an ideal world were updating you all with good news sometime soon, but it also means we have to start planning more in earnest about what happens if we're not able to open on time in the fall of 2022 at AMC, and start exploring a variety of options, which include pushing to stay at Birney for an additional year, which I know Laura has talked to Paul about and is not off the table. It wouldn't be simple because we need to take up more space in the building than we currently take up, and Excel is obviously using the rest of that building right now--the DCPS School. It would be sort of rejiggering our moving to Wilkinson so that we're either moving in in modular units to start, or moving in before all the renovation happens--something that allows us to delay further our schedule but still move in in fall of 2022. Could also imagine us keeping some students our V Street location, which does not have a ton of extra space, but we could convert some staff spaces into student spaces. Maybe we could fit one grade level there. Or combining a few of these different options together. Maybe some kids stay at Birney, some kids stay at V Street, and that buys us an additional year to go through this process. And look to other short-term lease options as well. None of these alternatives are good, and so obviously by far our hope and our first priority is to work with the Deputy Mayor and hopefully resolve this and continue back on our path, but I think it's at the point where we need to be more seriously considering some of those other alternatives as backup plans.

Michela English: Dan, could you say a little bit more about what the specific new issue is with DGS? I'm still trying to understand: is this a timing issue or an issue of substance? It sounds like it's more of a substance issue now.

Dan Englander: It's my understanding that what DGS has tried to relay--in generous-ish language--is not especially clear or coherent from meeting to meeting. So in some ways it's a little difficult to really uncover what it is that their leadership team--and I think more importantly the District's lawyers, I think, are what is driving this process right now. From my best understanding is, it is not so much a substantive issue in the sense that nobody's arguing that other schools could have access to Wilkinson or other organizations could have access to Wilkinson instead of DC Prep. It is a timing issue, and a question of whether we have to go through the 10-801 process, which has in the regulations some very prescribed timeframes. We would have to post public notice, wait 60 days, post some more notice, do this other thing, and given where we are right now in the timeline, we really have to have a letter of intent and a

lease that's approved by Council by the time they go to recess the summer, to be able to break ground this fall for our current plans.

Terry Eakin: Bottom line is, it's very very very difficult to get business done with the District of Columbia. This is partially political and mostly just slow slow slow. Maura, you've seen more schools than we have. Do you have--how have others been able to accelerate the bureaucracy into doing something right for the kids. Do you have any...?

Maura Marino: I mean, this is a really unique situation. So I would say what other folks have done is figure out ways to operate in buildings before they have a lease, but that's usually because somebody has a master lease with the city and so they're falling under a different lease, like Building Hope, and so there's more flexibility in those terms. We don't have that in this situation. So I think that the conversations that it sounds like Laura is already having make a lot of sense. The backup plans with Dan describe make sense. I suggest that we maybe get some expertise from lawyers who know the city code really well, so that if there is room for multiple views on this issue of what the city exempted us from and what it didn't, we should just get some expert advice on that. But I'm not sure there's anything else we can be doing that we're not already doing.

Laura Maestas: I hope to be able to provide a better update on that question later this week because I know that there was a meeting happening today with a cadre of city lawyers to discuss what constraints there are and whether there's ways to move forward as quickly as possible.

Terry Eakin: Jair Lynch is a well-connected advisor. This is the owner's rep. I'd like to think he can help. But you know, it's just so difficult to get anything done with the District of Columbia. It's just incredible that it would take a couple of years to get a lease done. Based on my experience in dealing with the District, I can't be overly optimistic, but good luck.

Laura Maestas: I'm hopeful that we will have more news later this week. We will surely update you as soon as we know more. I think I was encouraged that the message that I heard from the Deputy Mayor's office was, they know the quality of school that we are able to provide and they view the building as being best used by having a strong middle school. I heard that they will do what they can to support the decision that the mayor put into effect through the legislation that she passed last year. And so now I think we just need to hear what the outcome of the conversations were today.

Michela English: Okay, anything else on AMC? And Dan, let us know if we can do anything to help. And I didn't ask at the beginning, but were there any questions or comments for Laura and the team from the materials they sent out? The dashboard and the outline of what was going on at each of the campuses. Anything jump out at anybody?

Jenny Abramson: No, it was great, Laura.

Michela English: Okay, so I think with that, we'll go into closed session, and Laura is going to tell us how we do that mechanically. And in the closed session, under the Open Meetings Act, we are allowed to discuss personnel matters, training and development for the board, and issues like that. And those will be the types of topics that we will cover tonight. And that is consistent with the Open Meetings Act. So what do you want us to do, Laura?

Laura Maestas: So we need a motion to go into closed session for the purposes of discussing training and development for the board, pursuant to D.C. official code 2-575(b)(12).

Terry Eakin: So moved.

Michela English: Second?

Patrick Clowney: Second.

Michela English: Okay.

Laura Maestas: Now we need a roll call vote.

Michela English: Now we need a roll call vote. Okay, Patrick.

Patrick Clowney: Yes.

Michela English: Okay, Judy.

Judy Lansing Kovler: Yes.

Michela English: Collette.

Collette Bruce: Yes.

Michela English: Maura.

Maura Marino: Yes.

Michela English: Terry.

Terry Eakin: Yes.

Michela English: Jenny.

Jenny Abramson: Yes.

Michela English: Nicole.

Nicole Davy: Yes.

Michela English: Ahmad.

Ahmad Hajj: Yes.

Michela English: Sterling.

Sterling Thomas: Yes.

Michela English: And Emily.

Emily Lawson: Yes.

Michela English: Okay. I think I got everyone, so I think it's unanimous in favor of going into closed session.

Laura Maestas: Great, and I'm going to let the rest of my team go.

Michela English: Okay. Thank you, team. We appreciate everything you're doing in these very extraordinary times. Thanks for everything. Hang in there.

Maura Marino: And to thank Suraj. This is his last week. So on behalf of the board, just want to thank you for your incredible service to DC Prep, Suraj.

Michela English: We'll miss you, Suraj. I think you know that. But we wish you all the best.

Judy Lansing Kovler: Thank you, Suraj.

Ahmad Hajj: Good luck!

Suraj Patel: Thank you, thank you.

Laura Maestas: Okay, I'm going to stop this recording.

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