



**Written Testimony of
Dr. Michelle Walker-Davis, Executive Director
DC Public Charter School Board**

**Student Vaccine Mandate Hearing
Committee of the Whole
October 27, 2021**

DC PCSB supports the Coronavirus Immunization of School Students and Early Childhood Workers Amendment Act of 2021. We know that the COVID-19 vaccine is safe and the most effective way to reduce the spread of the disease and keep people healthy. So, it is time to ensure everyone who can get vaccinated does. While we support this legislation, we urge Council to thoughtfully weigh the potential challenges that lay ahead and consequences that this policy may have. Ultimately, having 100% vaccination rates among staff and eligible students will stabilize school environments, allow for more intensive learning, and keep everyone healthy.

The biggest challenges to this school year have been the result of COVID-19. All the difficulties navigating quarantine guidance, balancing in-person and virtual instruction, identifying close contacts, and addressing family fears are the challenges schools endure when there are large numbers of unvaccinated people congregating together. A vaccine requirement will go a long way to address these problems and curb the pandemic's adverse impact on academic progress. High vaccination rates means fewer quarantines and students learning remotely, and students and their families are safer in their schools and the broader community.

I want to emphasize that we will need to support schools and families as we implement this policy. We need to make the pediatric COVID vaccine as accessible as possible. Schools and other youth-focused sites will certainly want to host vaccination clinics, and we need to make sure that DC Health and other medical partners dispatch plenty of well-trained staff and all the necessary resources to run clinics smoothly. There also needs to be clear, varied, and well communicated logistics that the District and our partners follows through on. Teachers and principals are not medical professionals, and it should not fall on them to run, schedule, or pick up the slack at vaccination clinics.

The city also needs to continue to work on addressing vaccine hesitancy. Just as setting up clinics should not fall on our schools, addressing hesitancy should not be their sole responsibility either. This is citywide problem that needs a citywide solution. Some families have questions, and DC has many trusted community leaders and medical professionals who can answer those

questions empathetically and sincerely. We need to meet families where they are which will require hard work in the community, but it will ultimately make implementing the requirement easier.

Finally, if the Council moves forward with this requirement, we all must understand and be clear on the consequences of non-compliance. In conversations with LEA leaders we have heard concerns about implementation. Among the questions to consider are:

- How will LEAs be expected to track vaccine information mid-year?
- Would LEAs be expected to enforce the No Shots No School policy in relation to the vaccine?
- How should schools address continued noncompliance?
- How long will the COVID vaccine be required by the city?

Once we address these questions, we hope that LEAs will have clear, concise guidance to implement this new requirement. To be clear, schools need as much support from as many sources as possible in the coming months.

Thank you for allowing us to comment on this bill. We believe this path is best for the health of our students and the health of our schools. We hope that you will support and move this legislation as soon as is feasible.

Dr. Michelle Walker-Davis
Executive Director