



Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness
for Women and their Children

August 24, 2020

The Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor, The City Of New York
Tweed Courthouse
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Mr. Richard A. Carranza
Chancellor, New York City Department of Education
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Re: A safe school reopening for homeless students that meets learning needs

Dear Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Carranza,

As New York City's largest provider of shelter, services and supportive housing for homeless families with children, we are gravely concerned that homeless students are being left behind by the education system's uneven response to the COVID-19 crisis. With schools set to reopen in a few short weeks, thousands of families in Win shelters are grappling with an impossible and frightening choice: allow their children to fall further behind because of remote learning that is failing to adequately provide them access to learning and support, or risk exposure to a deadly virus in order to partake in the classroom instruction and supports they need to advance academically and socially.

We are calling on you to immediately address the lack of preparedness and resources that underlie the inadequacy of options available to homeless families before you open schools this fall and postpone the opening date to urgently fill these gaps.

From the beginning of last spring, remote learning failed students in shelter. Looking at a new school year, they continue to endure late and inconsistent access to technology and technology supports, placing already-struggling students and parents at a further disadvantage and state of disconnection. Not only is the basic prerequisite of technology out of reach for many homeless students, remote learning has also disconnected them from the supports – academic, developmental, socio-emotional, and administrative – that are provided in schools to help homeless students get or stay on track despite the many challenges of poverty and homelessness. For homeless students to succeed, the DOE must ensure that homeless students can access the technology and the support services – such as individualized instruction and tutors, paraprofessionals, Bridging the Gap social workers, and a live IT helpdesk – they need, even during remote learning. Despite calls from homeless services organizations like Win, these basic services have yet to be provided, holding thousands of homeless students back.



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The urgency of addressing these shortcomings in the DOE's remote learning plan cannot be exaggerated. Homeless students have already lost out over the spring and summer months, and remote learning will continue to be part of any future educational formula. In order to ensure that achievement gaps do not continue to widen, our students need a plan to ensure effective instruction.

Faced with the shortcoming of remote learning and with limited resources available to address them, many parents in our shelters have chosen blended learning for their students. Homeless parents are making this choice despite lack of clarity and trust in the health and safety criteria and procedures that the DOE is putting in place. For example, despite cries from community doctors and the teachers unions, there is no plan for screening and testing in schools for students, staff or teachers. Parents are afraid that their student will get sick, and that they will bring the virus back to their close shelter quarters. For homeless parents and children who suffer disproportionately high rates of health conditions that make them vulnerable to COVID-19, sending their children to school could be a life or death decision. But the utter failure of the remote learning system to date has made the hybrid choice appear, for many, to be the better of two very bad choices.

We are also extremely disturbed by DOE's inadequate communication and engagement with parents in shelters. With the beginning of the school year only weeks away, there is no known plan to provide transportation for homeless students. A number of students in our shelters have not received notification of what school they are registered to attend, or other communications regarding schedules and other first day of school information. The closure of school buildings severed important communications and administrative channels, including the near disappearance of Family Liaisons and closing of Regional Offices, and these have not been reestablished in preparation for the new school year. Despite public assurances, the DOE has not made it clear to our parents that they are ready to welcome students back to school. To open schools without these critical supports for the city's neediest children in place would be absolutely unconscionable.

Over 100,000 public school students are homeless, and along with their parents are looking to City Hall and the DOE during these exceptionally challenging times to provide the leadership, expertise, communication, and supports that keep them healthy, safe, and on track in their learning and development. We urge the Mayor and the Chancellor to exercise an abundance of caution, and to only open schools when fully prepared to do so safely and smoothly. We also call on you to fill the support and communication gaps that are preventing homeless students from succeeding with remote learning. Homeless students are eager to learn, and it is our shared responsibility to extend them every opportunity to be healthy and successful in school. We aren't there yet.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Christine C. Quinn'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christine C. Quinn