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Sept. 1, 2021

To the Board of Commissioners and CEO Santelises,

My name is J'aime Drayton and I am the Executive Director of Baltimore Family Alliance. Baltimore Family Alliance is an alliance of families committed to living in Baltimore City and making our City a better place for all citizens. We do not advocate for any organization or individual person. We advocate for all families within Baltimore City. Many of our families, including my own, send our most precious gifts (our children) to City Schools, with the expectation that they will be in a safe environment and a challenging academic atmosphere. As you are aware, City Schools have grossly failed our families this week.

According to your Priority III and IV¹, City Schools will have high-quality, modernized facilities and resources that support the success of students, educators, administrators, and staff and will effectively engage all stakeholders which include parents, families, and caregivers in their child's education and community partners who can contribute to the student's success. City Schools has failed to achieve either of these priorities during the first week of school.

Lack of AC Units Properly Functioning

On Monday, parents were informed that some schools were closing early due to lack of proper ventilation and AC units. These schools have been closed for the last 18 months. In 18 months, why were the units not properly fixed? As of two weeks ago, why were families in those schools not notified of the issue concerning proper ventilation? For example, my four children (from pre-k to 8th grade) all attend Montebello Elementary and Middle School. Neither I nor my husband was notified before Sun., Aug. 29th at 10pm that school would dismiss at noon on Mon., Aug. 30th. My husband works in Howard County, which left the burden on me to pick up my children 2.5 hours ahead of the scheduled time. I have a car. Many of our families ride the bus or rely on public transportation. How were working families supposed to leave their jobs during the day to attend to children? Why were parents not given the opportunity to have virtual school the first month, with the school's educators, giving City Schools more time to fix the AC issue or simply wait until after the summer heat to start in person learning? Who will reimburse parents who work for hourly pay for loss wages?

One parent's school had mold in the classrooms as of last Friday. The school was able to inspect the problem and fix it by Tuesday, with an email update. But, the school still does not have air conditioning. This school was supposed to receive AC. A letter was issued in May. But, there was no correspondence to parents to inform them that the AC was not installed. We need follow up when projects are delayed. Parents don't want to transfer their students. They want to be able to voice their concerns and be taken seriously as a parent.

¹ <https://www.baltimorecityschools.org/board-school-commissioners>



Lack of Communication in Advance

For two days (Mon.-Tues.), City Schools failed to notify parents more than 48 hours in advance of a half-day dismissals. Parents did not receive 24 hours notice. How can parents plan transportation and childcare without proper notice?

Lack of Communications - MDOT

Did you notify MDOT MVA (MVA) that schools would release students earlier? I do not believe they were notified. I personally saw middle school students released at 11:10 am at Montebello on Northern Parkway. Some of those students did not arrive at Lake Montebello (only 10 minutes away) until 12:58 pm. What is the joint plan between MVA and City Schools on handling early dismissals during a bus shortage? Will City Schools provide Uber or Lyft credits to middle school students during early dismissal to keep them from waiting an hour or more for MVA?

Extreme Heat and Parents Standing Outside

On Monday and Tuesday, parents, elderly caregivers, and friends stood in 97 °F heat outside the building without benches, chairs, water bottles, or fans, because the school would not allow parents to wait in the building. This happened in the morning and afternoon for pick up. This is unallowable and dangerous.

Crossing Guards

Montebello is temporarily relocated to Northern Parkway, which is an extremely busy street. For the past three days, there have been no School Crossing Guards. Where are they? Why are young children as young as 4 years old made to cross the street without support? Is there a shortage of guards?

IEP Transportation

Other families have not received proper notice regarding their children with IEP's rights to adequate transportation. When will guidance be given regarding this issue?

Uniforms

There is some confusion regarding whether or not uniforms are mandatory this fall. Would you mind clarifying whether students will receive a demerit or mark on their permanent record if they are not in compliance with school uniform?

Answering to Families

Why hasn't an emergency board meeting been called to directly address parents? For the past three days, City School families have had a remarkably different first week of school compared to other LEAs. We deserve better. Our kids deserve the best. Please remember that parents are your customers. You would never tolerate BGE cutting off your lights and not telling you. We need City Schools to communicate in advance and answer to families when reasonable expectations fall short of the best City Schools have to offer.

As an advocate of parents throughout the city, I cannot amplify my own voice alone. I have included questions that parents submitted to our partner organization, Parent and Community Advisory Board's survey:



“I would like all schools in the district to have options for outdoor lunch and learning space. There is no reason to have kids crammed into cafeterias before they are all vaccinated. Also, I have a child in pre-k at Gardenville Elementary, but there was no option to select a second school. “

-Parent at Baltimore International Academy living in 21214

“1) Why can't testing start prior to week 3? All kinds of documentation is required for students prior to starting school. Why is the consent form any different? Test them on day 1. 2) How will you provide meaningful education to students who are quarantined but not sick? Work packets and recorded videos are awful. Synchronous virtual learning is needed on those days. Figure it out.”

-Parent at Roland Park Elementary and Middle School living in 21210

“How are they going to keep the children distanced? What are the sanitation steps being taken? How are eating periods going to go? Will there be sufficient personal hygiene items such as soap? How often are common touch points like railings and door handles being cleaned? Are there functioning sinks in the classrooms?”

-Parent at Mt. Royal Elementary School living in 21212

“Virtual learning should have been offered at each individual school. Parents should not have to choose between their children being safe and them (students) possibly losing their spot at their assigned school by participating in a district-wide virtual learning setting that is unfamiliar.”

-Parent at Creative City Public Charter School living in 21216

“Too many students in a classroom. Not enough cleaning supplies.”

-Parent at Sandtown-Winchester Achievement Academy living in 21217

“1). One of the documents that were linked at the beginning of this survey has 54 pages. I don't believe many people will read that. 2). I am concerned that testing isn't starting until AFTER kids return. To me it would make sense that all kids would be tested in the week before school starts at the back-to-school events 3). I heard that pool testing isn't starting until 3 weeks into school, which to me sounds like a catastrophe in waiting 4). I haven't received any of the above linked materials from my kid's school. I generally pay attention to stuff and seek out info, so I had known some of it/paid attention, but I don't think the average parent has seen/knows the protocols 5). Is proper mask-wearing (i.e covering nose and mouth, putting the mask back on after eating) enforced? How? 6). How long are quarantine periods? 7). One of the linked pages says to sign and return to the school. Why hasn't my school given me this form?”

-Parent at Turnbridge Public Charter School living in 21206

“Baltimore Leadership School is closed for 3 days with no explanation.”

-Parent at Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women

“Brown water coming from the sinks. Children scared to wash their hands.”

-Anonymous Parent

“Will be same problem with heat in winter. May not dismiss early but our kids shouldn't have to sit in school with winter coats/hats/gloves.”



The state of many buildings where we have to rely on water coolers bc the pipes/water quality.”

-Anonymous Parent

Conversation between two parents: ““Not an issue at my school, but I’ve come across a number of parents with elementary school kids that don’t have access to an after school program that begins day 1 of school, is offered 5 days/week, and is offered to all grades in the school. This impacts parents who can’t or don’t work from home and single parents all the more so.

This is a long-time issue but also relevant as it concerns first week issues.”

“Or before school!!!! I have a parent who has been in tears trying to arrange before care and figure out how to get to work on time with two kids starting at the same time (one in elementary and one in high school) and both of them start when she's already supposed to have been at work for an hour.”

-Anonymous Parents

“Many students have one to one aides in their IEP’s. In most cases, these are hired/controlled by central office and assigned to schools. A child who needs an aide needs it to ensure their safety and/or to make academic and functional progress. There is a widespread shortage of aides putting many children in danger.”

-Anonymous Parent

“We need an easy way, a link, to let the administration know when our kids are quarantining.”

-Anonymous Parent

“Transportation. My son is special needs and was supposed to be picked up each day at 7:57am and transported to school. The bus has not shown up in the last 3 days and I have been driving my son to school. I have not heard anything from the district or the bus company regarding what they plan to do to resolve this issue.”

-Anonymous Parent

“How will you be using ARP & Cares Act funds to mitigate the negative consequences of COVID-19? How will the District be supporting schools to make lunch time safer and preferably outdoors as much as possible? How will you be supporting early learners who have missed critical socialization over the last 18 months? Would like to see more staffing at recess to facilitate safe play.”

-Parent at Francis Scott Key Elementary and Middle School living in 21230

“My son was in on the stop at St. Paul St. and 31st for 1 1/2 hours before his bus came. The two that were scheduled in that time frame never showed. SMH.”

-Anonymous

“I don't feel our kids are safe enough at lunch. And I'm not getting enough feedback from our school.”

-Parent at Hamilton Elementary and Middle School living in 21214

“I would like to see a vaccine mandate for all school staff, and if the kids like to eat outside.”

-Parent at Patterson Park Public Charter School living in 21214



“I want to add some communication failures I have experienced as a parent of an 8th grader at RPEMS, the first being the most significant on my opinion. 1) there wasn’t any communication before starting school about needing to have a district issued laptop and to bring it to school everyday. We never received one because my daughter had a personal laptop to use during zoom school last year. As school was starting (in an email the day before school) there was an instruction to bring your district issued laptop everyday. Now my daughter and many of her classmates are waiting for a laptop to be issued and teachers are frustrated that they don't have them. She has been unable to participate in class work during school (as have many of her classmates) because most of it is design to be done on google classroom and they have been unable to get all the kids their machines. This could easily have been addressed before school started, but we were not told this is how it would work. 2) we were not sent class schedules or home room assignments but the kids were supposed to know which home room to go to in the first day, and my daughter says most kids were confused. 2) I don’t believe we were ever sent her grades from last year. “
-Parent at Roland Park Elementary and Middle School living in 21206

“At what point do we start exploring reopening the virtual option for schools. Surely you can't think that having this number of children in rooms, eating together is safe. It's not.”
-Parent at The Green School living in 21214

“Why is the BCPSS Covid Tracker down?”
-Anonymous Parent

“School desks are directly next to each other (my child will be surrounded by 5 unvaccinated people) & there is no covid testing to be conducted for the first 3 weeks. When testing is done, it will only be done on children that have turned in the consent form. (During the Spring hybrid program - testing was completed and desks were at least 3 feet from each other.)”
-Parent at Hampden Elementary and Middle School living in 21211

“Will the protocol when students are exposed to Covid/variant be similar to this past year, isolation for 10 days? If so, this will greatly impact families, including mine because I have full-time employment.”
-Parent at Mergenthaler Vocational-Technical High School living in 21224

“How will schools be able to ensure 6ft with full return of students in person?”
-Parent at Elmer A. Henderson: A Johns Hopkins Partnership School living in 21206

“The rapidly changing risks involving the new and more dangerous Delta variant do not seem to have been considered at all in the plan. The fact that there is no transparency about any plans for students to continue receiving instruction during times of quarantine is troubling. Obviously, there is some awareness at some level that this will be a need due to the distribution of laptops. The virtual option was so limited in its scope and required surrendering your spot at charter or schools of choice made it an untenable option for many families who would have preferred to remain virtual. The only remaining alternative to sending kids into an unsafe situation is to homeschool. For students with learning differences or IEP/504, this isn't a viable option, either. This is a pandemic, everyone is traumatized and I see no acknowledgment of that reality and how it has and will continue to impact kids. People CANNOT learn while they are traumatized and do not feel safe. It is not physiologically possible. There doesn't appear to be any knowledge of child development and the impact of trauma on the brain anywhere in BCPSS leadership and



decision-making. Kids are no more "behind" than anyone else. They are functioning at the level they are able to function.”

-Parent at City Neighbors High School living in 21214

“We are all going to be infected and I'm risking my health for a career for which the public hates me.”

-Parent at Joseph C. Briscoe Academy living in 21231

“Will there be testing, and how frequently, for school personnel who are not vaccinated? Why is there no vaccination mandate for school personnel, like in NYC? “

-Parent at Medfield Heights Elementary School living in 21212

“I'd like to know who my child's teacher is, what supplies he needs, what his login information for his laptop is (he has one but the password recently changed and he can't get in now), how you will maintain social distancing while children are unmasked at lunch, and if 7:45 is the opening bell, when is breakfast served and what time should he actually arrive. “

-Parent at Dorothy I. Height Elementary School living in 21217

“ I want to help! My main concern this week has been lunch. My child told me that students were not observing social distancing during lunch, and staff were not enforcing it. I've also seen several teachers wearing masks improperly indoors. I would also like to have a streamlined way to report covid-related safety violations that are acknowledged somehow. I spent 3 hours on hold the other day and ended up getting disconnected, and when I send emails about safety violations, I never get a response.

On the positive side, our school principals are both working so hard and so late, and they seem to be doing everything they can, but this speaks to a failure of leadership at the district level. Admin staff at schools need more support. They shouldn't have to work 19 hour days to overcome the lack of planning at the district level.

We have kids at BIA and Gardenville, and we live in 21214. For the record, our classroom teacher at Gardenville is going out of her way to accommodate my high-risk child. I donated picnic blankets to the class, and she takes them outside to eat everyday so far (except yesterday, obviously). BIA is doing their best, I think, but they are so overburdened and understaffed, they are struggling to enforce safety measures.

Please let me know how I can help!”

-Parent at Baltimore International Academy and Gardenville Elementary School living in 21214

“What contact tracing will be done for public transportation to and from school? I am concerned about the definition of 'close contact' being so limited. According to the definition, it seems that the only people considered in close contact will be at lunchtime. The definition assumes students will always adhere to best practices in mask-wearing.”

-Parent at Baltimore Polytechnic Institute living in 21230

Thank you to PCAB for surveying parents and gathering their questions. There are many more voices in communities that are not heard on Facebook, Twitter or on Town Halls. Many of those families are used to being silenced and worse utterly ignored. To our families all over the City, we are in this together.



We look forward to working with the District and other parent groups this school year to amplify their voices and concerns as well.

Best,
J'aime Drayton
Parent at Montebello Elementary and Middle School living in 21218
Executive Director, Baltimore Family Alliance
Connecting Communities / Empowering Families

Photo
Line of parents waiting in the heat to drop their children off.

