



Letter to District Department of General Services to Provide Online Dashboard to Track Status of DC School Facilities

Students returned to school buildings for in-person learning at the end of August and beginning of September 2021, after 17 months of distance learning due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. Despite the known timeline for the start of school, the anticipated need for robust facilities maintenance and enhancement, longstanding requests to the District Department of General Services for repairs, and rising concern over the more transmissible COVID-19 (coronavirus) Delta variant, families, teachers, and some Councilmembers documented in the weeks before the start of school [faulty heating, ventilation, and air conditioning \(HVAC\) equipment](#), [missing high efficiency particulate air \(HEPA\) filters](#), [missing outdoor equipment necessary for social distancing during lunch](#), and [other facilities issues](#) in school buildings across the District.

The District is facing [increasing case counts](#) and [hospitalizations](#), as well as concerns regarding [breakthrough cases](#) resulting from the more transmissible Delta variant. Only [56.5 percent of adults](#) are fully vaccinated in DC, and children under 12 are not yet eligible for COVID-19 (coronavirus) vaccination. Vaccinated individuals [can also transmit](#) Delta. DC has seen an [increased number of respiratory illnesses among children](#), including COVID-19 (coronavirus). On August 26, 2021, a [child from Fairfax County died of COVID-19 \(coronavirus\)](#).

Mayor Bowser ended the public health emergency on July 24, 2021. [Families](#), the [DC State Board of Education](#), [Advisory Neighborhood Commissions](#), and some [Councilmembers](#) have urged a virtual option for schools, but virtual learning is being provided [only in limited circumstances](#) for both public and public charter schools. DC Public Schools Chancellor Dr. Lewis Ferebee has said that a virtual learning option is [“not something we’re considering,”](#) a position [echoed by DC’s Deputy Mayor for Education](#) Paul Kihn. The absence of a virtual option demands even more robust protocols, including as related to the maintenance of our school buildings, to ensure the safety of our children, particularly those who cannot yet be vaccinated and must return to school in person.

In October 2020, [DC Public Schools announced more safety measures](#) at schools for the expected resumption of some in-person learning in November 2020, including \$24 million to improve filtration systems and for rapid testing. At that time, the District Department of General Services and DC Public Schools [committed to “ensuring HVAC and air quality in school facilities is properly suited to welcome back students and staff,”](#) including “a more comprehensive assessment and retrofit of the existing systems was mandatory to ensure an optimal HVAC/air quality environment conducive for students, faculty, and visitors to all 117 active public-school buildings.” The District Department of General Services and DC Public Schools provided that each school would have to [functioning HVAC and “proper air filtration” by December 31, 2020,](#)



and a “site-based walkthrough team” at each school would “verify all items on the building readiness checklist prior to individual school openings.”

Despite these commitments, a swell of complaints regarding [broken HVAC systems](#) and [missing HEPA filters](#) came in before the start of in-person learning in August and September 2021. DC Council Chair Phil Mendelson provided an [update](#) on Thursday, August 26 – four days before the start of in-person learning – regarding HVAC issues at some schools. Several schools received or were scheduled to receive spot coolers as an interim solution, although some schools could not use spot coolers due to insufficient windows. Other [Councilmembers visited schools](#), noting problems and temporary fixes. One individual has [raised over \\$3,000 to build filters](#) for DC public school classrooms and workspaces, as schools may not be receiving enough filters for libraries, auditoriums, and cafeterias and may not be receiving any filters for non-classroom spaces dedicated to English language learners and special education students.

The problems with school HVAC systems are not new; many have been issues for years, pre-dating the COVID-19 public health emergency, with longstanding requests to the District Department of General Services for fixes. For example, [the HVAC at Powell Elementary School has been broken since shortly after the school’s renovations](#), leaving classrooms and common areas without temperature control or air flow for several years. These repairs are more necessary than ever as we send children (many unvaccinated) back into school buildings while the Delta variant is surging.

As Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners have experienced, there is little transparency for requests to the District Department of General Services for repair, the timeline for repair, and implementation of fixes. Unlike other agencies, the District Department of General Services – which maintains District facilities – is not integrated within the public facing 311 system for requests for city services, but rather primarily relies on “DPR, DCPS, and other client agencies to inform us of community concerns and maintenance requests.” Agencies can submit a facilities maintenance request if they have a log-in for the Department’s internal system, and residents can submit a form and await the Department’s response.

Having functioning HVAC systems and HEPA filters is critical, particularly when the District is denying a virtual option and mandating in-person learning for a largely unvaccinated population. We recommend that the District Department of General Services assure transparency regarding HVAC and air quality in school facilities, including both public and public charter schools, by developing a [regularly updated online dashboard](#) (like this example from Baltimore City Schools) that includes information such as:

- the [standards employed](#) to “ensur[e] the air quality of our schools meets the highest standards of safety and reflect the health communities latest understanding of COVID-19”;
- the [facility classification of the school](#), whether that is a Type A facility with 100 percent outside air capability, a type B facility with partial outside air capability, or a type C facility



with no outside air capability;

- the number and type of [air filtration and temperature control systems employed](#) by each school, including whether the school uses larger units (e.g., central HVAC systems) and/or smaller units (e.g., portable medical grade true HEPA filters), and as compared to the number of and use of rooms (e.g., instructional spaces, workspaces, shared spaces);
- the current status of each school's air filtration and temperature control systems, including not just the number of [HEPA filters, particulate counts, and CO2 levels](#), but also [HVAC filters, temperature, humidity, and VOCs](#);
- interim or temporary measures employed by each school to address air filtration and temperature control challenges (e.g., spot coolers);
- underlying requests for repairs and maintenance of school air filtration and temperature control systems, as well as related government and government contractor assessments; and
- the schedule for monitoring safety protocols related to school air quality and temperature control.

We also urge the District Department of General Services' to strengthen its [Indoor Air Quality Monitoring Report](#) to reflect accurate and current information. As the Department has recognized, "[real-time system health checks](#)" are necessary and [the "efficiency of the filtration and dilution via fresh air must be monitored ... \[a\]s people occupy the space and the time element increases."](#) The August 27, 2021, report indicates all DC Public Schools have excellent or very good air quality scores, when the Department has admitted publicly they had not completed HVAC system maintenance and updates and some school buildings had non-functioning HVAC systems and missing HEPA filters.

As a result of these outstanding issues and concerns, in September 2021 ANC's 4B and 4C will be considering resolutions calling for the Department of General Services to institute an online dashboard which can track the status of HVAC and related facilities in DC schools.

RESOLVED:

That Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1C calls on the District Department of General Services, in coordination with DC schools, to develop a regularly updated online dashboard that provides information regarding the standards to assess, current status, and monitoring of each public and public charter school's air filtration and temperature control systems. The [Baltimore City Public School system already has a similar dashboard](#) in place that could be used as a model for any future system in DC.

That Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1C calls on the District Department of General Services to publicly record, track, and respond to school facility (and other government building)



Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1C
PO Box 21009, NW, Washington, DC 20009
anc1c.org
Representing Adams Morgan