



AFT 340 AFL-CIO
Seton Business Park
5800 Metro Drive, 2nd Floor
Baltimore, MD 21215-3209

December 22, 2021

Dear Dr. Santelises, Board Chair Richardson, and School Board Commissioners,

I am writing to you due to the tremendous intensification of COVID-19 transmissions within our school buildings and across the broader community. The seven-day positivity rate has quadrupled to 12.15% over the past month, and over 6,200 cases were reported in Maryland in the last 24 hours alone, the highest one-day total since the beginning of the pandemic. We have met with BCPSS staff and have had several conversations with Labor Relations, and we are concerned about the lack of preparation and contingency plans regarding the surge of the omicron variant.

There is much we do not yet know, but what is clear is that transmissions are at record levels and vaccination does not eliminate infection. It is prudent and necessary for City Schools to consider all possibilities. However, there have only been minimal changes to the status quo and we have not heard of any contingency plans that could be enacted if circumstances continue to worsen.

I am calling on City Schools to act in the best interests of safety by transitioning to virtual learning beginning tomorrow, December 23rd, for the half day of scheduled instruction and for the week of January 3rd through the 7th. On December 23rd teachers should post an asynchronous assignment in the morning. All staff should spend the remainder of the day preparing for virtual instruction to take place, at a minimum, during the week students return, January 3rd through January 7th.

On January 3rd and 4th City Schools should offer asynchronous instruction, while opening school buildings exclusively for technology distribution, and for administering PCR tests and providing students and families with multiple at-home rapid tests. During this week all air filters and ventilation systems must be checked and changed/upgraded. This past week, school-based staff have reiterated that many air filters and purifiers are in need of further maintenance.

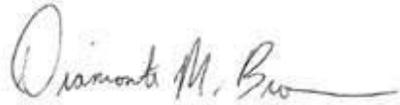
Upon a contingent return to in-person instruction (see below) on January 10th, City Schools should test every student and staff member with a rapid test and a PCR test. Individuals who test positive should not be permitted to stay in school.

City Schools must be prepared to adapt to widespread transmission, student illness, and staff absences. Schools without adequate staffing not only fail to offer high quality instruction, they exacerbate unsafe environments. District leadership must collaborate with the BTU and its other employee representatives to create clear, consistent guidance and thresholds for how and when transitions to online instruction occur for individual classrooms, entire school communities, and the district at large. These guidelines must be available to families, staff, and the City Schools community so that we have clarity and can adequately prepare.

A school-by-school, wait-and-see approach creates crises in schools and confusion across the district. We need district-wide action now.

Over winter break my team is prepared to meet with you to work to ensure the safety of students and staff. If City Schools does not have the supplies necessary to carry out this plan, we urge you to work with Mayor Scott and the Baltimore City Health Department, along with the broader healthcare community, to address and correct any shortages.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diamonté M. Brown". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

President Diamonté Brown

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