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**BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL  
EDUCATION, WORKFORCE, AND YOUTH  
COMMITTEE**

*Mission Statement*

*The Committee on Education, Workforce and Youth (EWY) is responsible for creating opportunities for our young people, ensuring economic opportunity and prosperity for Baltimore's workforce, and supporting our most vulnerable neighbors. The committee's areas of jurisdiction include public education, labor relations, workforce development, employment, public parks, recreation, and youth affairs. Issue areas include, but are not limited to: education, including adult education, higher education, workforce development, labor, senior affairs, veterans, childcare, accessibility and disability issues, recreation and parks, and historical landmarks.*

**The Honorable Robert Stokes, Sr.  
Chairman**

**PUBLIC HEARING**

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 04, 2021  
5:00 PM**

**VIRTUAL WEBEX MEETING**

**TO BE TELEVISED ON CHARM TV 25**

***Council Resolution #21-0012R***

**Investigative Hearing – Safe Return to In-Person Schooling**

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**CITY OF BALTIMORE**

BRANDON M. SCOTT, Mayor



**OFFICE OF COUNCIL SERVICES**

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**BILL SYNOPSIS**

**Committee:** Education, Workforce and Youth

**Resolution:** 21-0012R

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**Investigative Hearing – Safe Return to In-Person Schooling**

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**Sponsor:** Councilmember Stokes, Sr., et al

**Introduced:** January 25, 2021

**Purpose:**

**For the purpose** of inviting the CEO of the Baltimore City Public School System to provide the City Council with an update regarding safety precautions the School System is taking for the return of students to in-person schooling and inviting representatives from the Baltimore City Fire Department, Health Department, and Department of Housing and Community Development to comment on the adequacy of those safety precautions.

**Effective:** Upon enactment.

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**Agency Reports**

Law Department	None submitted as of this writing
Baltimore City Public School System	None submitted as of this writing
Fire Department	None submitted as of this writing
Health Department	None submitted as of this writing
Department of Housing and Community Development	None submitted as of this writing
Mayor’s Office of Children and Family Success	None submitted as of this writing

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## Analysis

### Current Law

**Baltimore City Code – Article 1, Subtitle 1-City Council, Section 1-6**

**§ 1-6. Agencies to provide legislative information.**

It shall be the duty of the head of every City department or bureau established by the Baltimore City Charter or by ordinance to provide all technical materials, plats, drawings, and information that are requested by any member or the President of the City Council for the purpose of introducing legislation into the Council.  
(City Code, 1976/83, art. 1, §6.) (Ord. 76-080.)

### Background

On February 4, 2021 representatives from the Baltimore City Public School System and from pertinent city agencies will come before the Committee to share information and/or to have an open dialogue about processes in place to facilitate the safe return of Baltimore City’s students to in-person schooling.

Per the primary sponsor of the Resolution, “I have received ‘so many calls’ from teachers expressing their concerns about potential safety issues when the students return to in-person schooling. We know that COVID-19 has impacted our city as well as the entire country, and it is very important that we keep an open dialogue about this issue and to have a clear understanding of the situation at hand.”<sup>1</sup>

*Also see attached - recent articles pertaining to students returning to in-person school.*

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### Additional Information

**Fiscal Note:** None

**Information Source(s):** City Code and Council Resolution 21-0012R

*Marguerite M. Currin*

Analysis by: Marguerite M. Currin  
Analysis Date: February 2, 2021

Direct Inquiries to: (443) 984-3485

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<sup>1</sup> The Honorable Robert Stokes, Sr., Councilmember, District 12

# RECENT ARTICLES

***SEE ATTACHED***

# Baltimore City Council members ask schools chief to reconsider reopening plan

By LIZ BOWIE and EMILY OPILO

BALTIMORE SUN |

JAN 21, 2021 AT 9:42 AM

Three Baltimore City Council members are asking the school system to push back a planned mid-February opening of school buildings for kindergarten through second graders, despite efforts to speed vaccinations for teachers and school staff.

Councilmen Zeke Cohen, Ryan Dorsey and Kristerfer Burnett, all Democrats, have joined with union leaders who say it is too early to open schools, citing the levels of COVID-19 in the community. The Baltimore City Council members are pressing schools chief Sonja Santelises to wait until after returning [teachers have been fully vaccinated](#).

Cohen, Dorsey and Burnett said in a statement that city schools need a more detailed plan before students can return safely including guidance for cleaning and a roadmap to accommodate simultaneous virtual and in-person learning. The stress of learning online has been “profound” for city students, said Cohen, noting the city’s “gaping” digital divide. But sending teachers back to the classroom unvaccinated could be dangerous, Cohen said. Vaccinating them could take time. Teachers can’t be prioritized over the elderly or health professionals, he said.

“I don’t know that one is more important than another,” Cohen said.

Santelises said she has no plans to scale back or delay the reopening plan, but she will make adjustments if health metrics change or she foresees the need. The city’s testing positivity rate is trending down and Mayor Brandon Scott announced Wednesday that restaurants could resume limited indoor and outdoor dining Friday.

[Baltimore to allow indoor and outdoor dining to resume Friday, with one hour time limit for patrons »](#)

Santelises [laid out a plan last week](#) to continue a slow roll out of more in-person classes for families that decide they want their children in school. She will open all schools for kindergarten through second graders on Feb. 15 and then expand the option to third through fifth graders, ninth graders and seniors on March 1.

The next month allows teachers to return to their schools, survey their classrooms, and ask for changes if they do not have what they need in place, Santelises said.

Most school systems in the state remain closed, according to Maryland State Department of Education data. Santelises said she is persevering for those families in the city that have said their children need to get back to school.

While some Black families have been reluctant to send their children back because of historical skepticism that medical professionals will keep their children safe, Santelises said she also believes those families should be allowed to make their own decisions. She expects between 20% and 25% of students will return.

“With all due respect,” she said, “I am concerned about Black and brown families throughout the city having a choice.”

Baltimore Teachers Union leaders say they are planning protests and other actions in the coming days to get the attention of city leaders and have asked Scott to support a delay, an action he has not taken.

“It defies all logic and sanity. They are forcing us in before we get vaccinated,” said high school teacher Joel Pally.

He doesn’t believe most teachers will receive the recommended two shots of the vaccine before they are required to return to buildings.

Educators “see it as a life and death issue for themselves and their students and families,” Pally said. “We have to do everything in our power to fight for safe

schools. We are planning actions. We expect members in the streets daily protesting.”

[‘We can do this’: How an East Baltimore school is protecting students and staff from the coronavirus »](#)

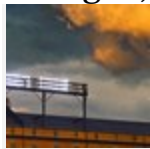
While some factions within the union have called for taking a strike vote, union leaders say they are not endorsing that action, which would be illegal under Maryland law and against their contract. In addition, the union would risk decertification, said Corey Gaber, a vice president of the executive board of the union. Some other protests, like a sick out, also could be interpreted as a strike, he said.

Teachers are demanding that all school-based staff be fully vaccinated, the ventilation systems be revamped, and that only teachers who volunteer return to the classrooms, union leaders said. Teachers also have concerns about the logistics of teaching some students online and others in-person.

The school system is working to find a way to provide routine testing at schools, as well as more vaccinations for educators. Currently, teachers can be vaccinated through the city health department or through Johns Hopkins Hospital, which has reserved 500 shots a week for teachers and school staff.

Santelises said more than 3,000 air purifiers arrived in the city Wednesday and will be deployed to classrooms in buildings where the ventilation systems cannot be upgraded. She also has pledged to have testing at schools for anyone who shows symptoms, small classes and enough protective gear.

The school system has been making adjustments when spread of the virus has changed, including going to all online learning the week after Thanksgiving.



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Daily

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“We have been adjusting,” she said, adding that she wasn’t going to make changes under pressure from politicians who have written a letter “when I have the best medical professionals in the country advising me.”

The council members said they want coronavirus positivity rates below 5% for a week before schools reopen. Baltimore’s positivity rate was 5.65% Tuesday, according to state data.

“We fully support and appreciate the urgency to bring our children back to school,” the councilmen said in their statement. “However according to public health officials the next few months may bring a surge of transmission caused by the new strain of COVID-19. We must do everything in our power to keep our communities safe.”

[While schools have reopened in much of the country, many Maryland students remain online »](#)

Scott has not joined the calls to postpone the return of students to the classroom but has instead been meeting with several city hospitals in hopes of making more vaccines available, his office said in a statement.

“The Mayor is committed to ensuring essential frontline workers have what they need to do their jobs safely as we continue to navigate this unprecedented pandemic, and is simultaneously focused on ensuring every student can access the education they deserve,” said his spokeswoman Stefanie Mavronis.

Teachers are eligible to be vaccinated during Phase 1B of the state’s vaccination plan, which is now open. But that group also includes adults at least 75 years old, the homeless, people who live in group homes and child care workers. Baltimore Health Commissioner Letitia Dzirasa says that group includes roughly 60,000 people in the city.

# A MESSAGE TO MARYLAND TEACHERS, PARENTS, AND EDUCATION LEADERS

January 22, 2021

Dear Maryland teachers, parents, and education leaders:

I have always believed that every single child in Maryland deserves a world-class education, regardless of what neighborhood they happen to grow in.

While school systems have made strides with remote learning during the pandemic, far too many students simply remain unable to thrive in such an environment. By the end of this school year, the cumulative learning loss for students could equate to five to nine months, on average, with the losses disproportionately affecting students of color, and disadvantaged students.

Meanwhile, federal, state, and academic health experts all agree that we should work together to safely get students back into classrooms.

- Dr. Anthony Fauci, the president's chief medical adviser, has said that **“our default position should be to try to keep the schools open and get children who are not in school back in school as best as we possibly can.”**
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recently stated, **“Children absolutely need to return to in-school learning for their healthy development and well-being.”**
- Data from contact tracing and epidemiologists have indicated that school reopenings do not increase community spread, or contribute to increased hospitalization rates.

The Maryland State Department of Education has approved safe reopening plans for every school system, [and state health officials have issued science-based protocols](#). More than \$1.2 billion in federal funding has been made available to support Maryland schools during the pandemic. The state has provided PPE and testing resources to counties. School systems have begun the process of vaccinating staff.

**We are calling on all county school systems to make every effort to return to hybrid in-person instruction no later than Monday, March 1.**

By law, these decisions to reopen schools ultimately rest with the duly elected and appointed county school boards. But I want to be perfectly clear: I will do everything I possibly can to give all of our children the chance to get back into the classrooms.

I want to commend all the teachers, administrators, parents, and students, who have continued to adapt under difficult and trying circumstances. It is truly inspiring.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a yellow background. The signature reads "Larry Hogan" in a cursive, flowing script.

Larry Hogan  
Governor

View this message as a URL: <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/MDGOV/bulletins/2bad97d>

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This email was sent to [marquerite.murray@baltimorecity.gov](mailto:marquerite.murray@baltimorecity.gov) using GovDelivery Communications Cloud on behalf of: Maryland Governor's Press Office · 100 State Circle, Annapolis, MD 21401

**GOVDELIVERY** 

# Council Resolution 21-0012R

## AGENCY REPORTS

*None received as of this writing*

**CITY OF BALTIMORE  
COUNCIL BILL 21-0012R  
(Resolution)**

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Introduced by: Councilmembers Stokes, McCray, Middleton, Burnett, Bullock, Ramos, Torrence,  
Conway, Glover, Cohen

Introduced and read first time: January 25, 2021

Assigned to: Education, Workforce, and Youth Committee

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REFERRED TO THE FOLLOWING AGENCIES: City Solicitor, Baltimore City Public School System,  
Fire Department, Health Department, Department of Housing and Community Development,  
Mayor's Office of Children and Family Success

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A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

1 A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning

2 **Investigative Hearing – Safe Return to In-Person Schooling**

3 FOR the purpose of inviting the CEO of the Baltimore City Public School System to provide the  
4 City Council with an update regarding safety precautions the School System is taking for the  
5 return of students to in-person schooling and inviting representatives from the Baltimore City  
6 Fire Department, Health Department, and Department of Housing and Community  
7 Development to comment on the adequacy of those safety precautions.

8 **Recitals**

9 **WHEREAS**, Due to the pandemic, the majority of Baltimore City schoolchildren have been  
10 participating in virtual schooling since last spring;

11 **WHEREAS**, The Baltimore City Public School System (“BCPSS”) will gradually introduce  
12 more students back to traditional in-person classes beginning with the start of the second  
13 semester, specifically students in kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade as well as 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade  
14 students, although families will have the option to remain in virtual learning; and

15 **WHEREAS**, The City Council and the public need to know what safety precautions BCPSS is  
16 taking in reopening schools to some students, such as whether all teachers will be vaccinated  
17 before students are allowed back, how classrooms will be organized for social distancing,  
18 information regarding ventilation systems in the schools, and whether the systems can adequately  
19 protect building visitors, etc.

20 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE**, That the City  
21 Council invites the CEO of the Baltimore City Public School System is taking for the return of  
22 students to in-person schooling and inviting representatives from the Baltimore City Fire  
23 Department, Health Department, and Department of Housing and Community Development to  
24 comment on the adequacy of those safety precautions.

EXPLANATION: Underlining indicates matter added by amendment.  
~~Strike out~~ indicates matter deleted by amendment.

**Council Bill 21-0012R**

1       **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the  
2       CEO of the Baltimore City Public School System, the Health Commissioner, the Fire Chief, the  
3       Acting Commissioner of the Department of Housing and Community Development, and the  
4       Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.