



WASHINGTON LAWYERS' COMMITTEE
FOR CIVIL RIGHTS AND URBAN AFFAIRS

February 4, 2020

Hon. Phil Mendelson
Chairman
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20004

Re: *Washington Metropolitan Opportunity Academy Emergency Declaration
Resolution of 2020*

Dear Chairman Mendelson,

We are writing to urge the Council to pass the *Washington Metropolitan Opportunity Academy Emergency Declaration Resolution of 2020* and keep Washington Met open. The decision to close the school was made without consideration for the input of the students, teachers, the elected State Board of Education, and the broader school community. The students at Washington Met deserve a city that invests in them rather than starves them of the resources they need to succeed.

Washington Met serves one of the highest concentrations of “at-risk” students in the city. Students come to Washington Metropolitan for many different reasons, often after attending another school that has not worked out for them. The small population at Washington Met allows for individualized attention and support, which is one of the main reasons students, parents and staff trust each other and want to keep their school community together. This rushed attempt by DCPS to determine the fate of Washington Met without adequate school community involvement undermines students who already experienced too much instability and trauma in their lives. The decision to close Washington Met sends a message that these students – almost all Black and Latino, and over 40% with disabilities – do not matter.

The decision to close Washington Met comes on the heels of years of disinvestment by DCPS – and this disinvestment caused the very circumstances that DCPS now cites as its reasons for closing the school. The low standardized test scores; underutilization of space; low attendance rates; and under-enrollment are the direct result of DCPS’ failures. Washington Met has had five principals in the last six years. DCPS has cut the school’s library, its art and music classes, and its athletic programs.¹ In 2017, as part of the mayor’s school mental-health expansion program, Washington Met was assessed and ranked as having the highest need in the city based on its high “at-risk” population. However, the school has not yet received a social worker as part of the program. Closing Washington Met will not remedy the educational neglect that these students have experienced, and in fact is likely to cause additional harm.

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/local-opinions/school-closures-in-dc-will-further-traumatize-already-vulnerable-students/2019/12/27/f8e7f1e8-17af-11ea-8406-df3c54b3253e_story.html

The Council should vote in support of the *Washington Metropolitan Opportunity Academy Emergency Declaration Resolution of 2020* and keep Washington Met open at its current location for at least the 2020-21 school year. This would allow more time to develop comprehensive long-term plan for Washington Metropolitan based on the critical input of students, staff, parents and the entire school community. This city has a duty to work with the community to create a Washington Met that will support its students. This starts by keeping Washington Met open.

Sincerely,



Kaitlin Banner
Deputy Legal Director



Kent Withycombe
Education Justice Project Director

Cc:

Mayor Muriel Bowser
Paul Kihn, Deputy Mayor for Education
Dr. Lewis Ferebee, Chancellor of DC Public Schools