

DCCA is a volunteer, nonprofit organization, founded in 1922 to promote and protect the Dupont Circle neighborhood.



9 Dupont Circle, NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
www.dupont-circle.org

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**2020 – 2021  
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Via email

October 16, 2020

Dr. Lewis Ferebee  
Chancellor  
DC Public Schools  
1200 First Street, NE  
Washington, DC 20002

Dear Chancellor Ferebee:

The Dupont Circle Citizens Association joins other civic groups, ANC's and a majority of DC Councilmembers in demanding answers to questions regarding the firing of an honored, respected and beloved educator and the safety of our schools as plans for in person instruction move forward.

Richard Trogisch took over leadership of Francis-Stevens Education Campus in 2012, when it was barely saved from closure, with only 190 students enrolled in a building with a capacity for 480 and failing test scores. He has since led the pre-K-thru-8 school to a remarkable turnaround, with nearly 600 students now enrolled from all eight wards, a waiting list of up to 800, vastly improved test scores, and increased academic rigor. Today both schools, representing 1200 DC families, boast a diverse enrollment, both are majority-minority, and in both schools the student body and parental involvement proudly have diverse leadership teams.

On Monday, October 5th, the Mayor announced plans to re-open schools in the coming weeks, and, at a meeting with the Chancellor, it is our understanding that Principal Trogisch asked specifically what air quality standards were being set by DCPS and how such standards would be measured and enforced at all schools. After no specific answer to his question was given, he said he later told his staff and parents that he would not open School Without Walls at Francis-Stevens unless he was certain that the safety of students, teachers, and staff was being safeguarded.

School Without Walls at Francis Stevens is a 93 year old building with no HVAC system, window air conditioners in each classroom, and numerous maintenance issues that come with an old building slated for major renovation in less than two years. The student body at SWW@FS includes students with disabilities including respiratory problems such as asthma, and adult staff members at the school include personnel in the high-risk category, with some up to the age of 70.

Apparently, less than 48 hours after Principal Trogisch questioned whether the air quality and ventilation standards at SWW@FS would allow the school to open safely, he was fired by DCPS with the pretext later given that there had been a student "enrollment anomaly" that occurred nearly two years earlier.

In light of all these circumstances, at a minimum:

- We demand a thorough explanation of the basis for and timing of the termination of Principal Richard Trogisch. The information disclosed to date raises serious concerns about whether a pretext was used to justify his termination. The manner in which he was terminated has created a chilling effect for anyone wanting to raise health and safety issues, even during a pandemic.
- We need more specific information regarding the air quality standards and ventilation (air exchange) standards which will be used by DCPS to determine whether schools and individual classrooms can reopen safely, and demand to know how those standards will be measured and enforced before schools are allowed to reopen.
- DCPS should engage parents, students and educators so as to ensure that all individuals have access to information on the metrics for reopening and safety measures being put in place so that parents and educators can make informed decisions as to how they wish to proceed with this school year. Given that DC has among the highest rates of asthma of major metropolitan areas in U.S. and that children from Wards 5,7, and 8 are impacted by respiratory illnesses at higher rates than other wards, understanding the state of the ventilation in every single DCPS building is critical to ensure that we do not put our children -- especially children of color -- who have already been disproportionately impacted by COVID -- at even further risk.
- The DC Council should hold hearings on remediation efforts conducted at every DC Public School facility as a step toward restoring public trust. Failure to do so will only add to fears of retaliation for whistleblowers and add to the fears of parents and teachers that our school buildings are not safe.

- Since SWW/SWWFS has five women associate and assistant principals, four of whom are women of color, with many years of experience with the School Without Walls community, the selection of any interim principal should come from within their ranks.
- DCPS should begin to include the Dupont Circle Citizens' Association and all of the District's civic and citizens associations as part of their outreach on matters involving public education.

We believe that these are the minimum actions needed to restore confidence on our schools.

Sincerely,



Glenn M. Engelmann  
President

cc:

The Honorable Mayor Muriel Bowser  
CM Phil Mendelson  
CM Brooke Pinto  
CM Anita Bonds  
CM David Grosso  
CM Elissa Silverman  
CM Robert C. White, Jr.