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PRESS RELEASE

Epidemiologists Support #KeepNYCSchoolsOpen City Hall Rally to Reopen Public Middle and High Schools and Halt Use of “Two Unlinked Cases” Rule for pre-K-12

Protesters Plan March from City Hall Park to UFT Headquarters, also Demand City Council Hearing

New York City—A diverse coalition of New York City public school families and students from all five boroughs are rallying at City Hall this morning to demand the immediate reopening of public middle and high schools and a halt to the so-called “two unlinked cases” rule for pre-K through high school. The #KeepNYCSchoolsOpen group will then march to the headquarters of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT).

A growing number of epidemiologists and public health experts are calling for the reopening of New York City public schools.

“Large studies show while transmissions in the communities increase, infection rates in schools remain low and in school transmissions are exceedingly rare,” said Dr. Jennifer Lighter, an epidemiologist and Associate Professor of Pediatric Infectious Diseases, NYU School of Medicine. **“It is time we create policy from evidence and prioritize children's needs.”**

“The two case rule was not based on science or evidence and it is doing tremendous harm to the overall well being of children, as it unnecessarily closes school for long periods of time repeatedly with accumulated massive hours lost of in-person instruction,” Dr. Lighter said.

According to the City’s [website](#), 254 elementary and District 75 school buildings are closed today; since a single school building can contain multiple co-located schools, the actual number of closed schools is much higher. (The total number of elementary and District 75 schools that are eligible to be open is only approximately 850.) The City has shut down buildings housing public schools 1,311 times since September 14.

In November, Mayor Bill de Blasio closed all public middle and high schools indefinitely, stranding the 145,000 students who began attending them in October. In December, the

Mayor reopened pre-Kindergarten through fifth grade and District 75 schools, only to doom them to constant, disruptive, and unnecessary closures thanks to the institution of the “two unlinked cases” rule.

In January, parent organizers delivered [an open letter](#) to the Mayor and the Department of Education explaining why the two unlinked COVID-19 cases rule—which triggers a 10 day shutdown of school buildings—is unscientific, overly conservative, and needlessly disruptive. The group has yet to receive a response.

Last month, UFT President Michael Mulgrew admitted the “two unlinked cases” rule was purposefully designed by his union in contravention to what doctors suggested and with the goal of keeping schools shut down.

“When you hear we're closing many schools, that's positive,” Mulgrew said to UFT delegates [during a January 13 meeting](#). **“We need to shut them down and our testing program was designed to do that.”** Mulgrew continued: “Doctors have said if you do everything else you can keep them open but I said no.”

“The system has been set up to fail,” said #KeepNYCSchoolsOpen co-founder Daniela Jampel, referring to the numerous, last-minute elementary school closures caused by the two-case rule. “We have a plan to shut schools down, not one that keeps them open. Every single day of in-person learning is invaluable to our children, and the City should be trying to provide as many in-person days as possible.”

“The City will not release data on how many kids are actually going to school each day, but based on the fact that middle school and high school is completely closed and almost a third of all elementary and District 75 schools are closed, I'd estimate that only 60,000 to 70,000 public school kids are actually attending school in person on any given day. This is an abject failure on the part of our education system,” Jampel continued.

As of September, the public school system in New York City had approximately 1 million students enrolled, a third of whom chose to attend in-person school. The majority of public school students have only attended school remotely for almost a year now, since the Mayor shut the system down last March due to rising rates of COVID-19 in the community.

The effects of remote learning on the mental and emotional health of these students has alarmed many parents, educators, public health officials, and pediatricians. Across the country, hospitals and mental health practitioners are reporting a disturbing spike in hospitalizations and completed suicides among adolescents.

“We are losing a generation because we are not taking into account that mental health is also health,” said Emily Rubinstein, an epidemiologist and civil engineer in Manhattan. “A big part of ‘public health’ in the developing world is making sure kids get an education. At the international level we know this, how education affects life spans and health outcomes, and we just took it away from our own kids. That’s wrong.”

List of Speakers:

- 1) Daniela Jampel, #KeepNYCSchoolsOpen parent organizer**
- 2) Ellen Smith, public health demographer**
- 3) Megan Cossey, middle school parent**
- 4) George Lanese, co-founder About U Outreach**
- 5) Adriana Aviles, candidate for City Council District 19**
- 6) Natalya Murakhver, elementary school parent**

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