

WHAT: Jacqueline Pogue Lyons' testimony at City Council's Public Safety and Violence Reduction Programs
WHEN: Monday, Oct. 30

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you on trying to reduce school violence in Washington, D.C.

I consider school violence reduction an urgent matter.

Apparently, the City Council also believes it's an urgent matter, otherwise you wouldn't have scheduled this hearing.

Where is the urgency on the part of DCPS to address this crisis!

This sums up why the Washington Teachers' Union, parents and community members are downright furious and frustrated. We shouldn't wait. What is DCPS' leadership waiting for? Again, this isn't how a school system acts in the face of an urgent crisis.

On June 8th, the WTU handed DCPS a proposal to address issues of school violence in and around DCPS schools. We did this outside of normal contract negotiations because there is "urgency," and we must act. Only after being asked about the proposals in public, DCPS claimed they did not receive it. Nevertheless, we widely distributed the proposal via email to ensure receipt. And the results after providing the proposal a second time, the same as the first. Nothing.

The MOU has 17 commonsense, practical proposals that should have been implemented by the time school opened on August 28th. The MOU includes providing counseling services for affected students, families and staff and regular mental health first-aid training for staff, parents and community members. It includes expanding the Safe Passage Program along with provisions for virtual learning in case of unsafe conditions. And it includes providing tailored professional training for educators and other programs that focus on well-being.

Nothing controversial, all very practical and much needed. It's been almost five months since we offered some "real solutions" to a serious problem that the city cannot sweep under the rug.

Where is DCPS' outrage? Where's their eagerness, humanity, and compassion to find "real solutions"?

The WTU has submitted proposals that offer "real solutions" that we'd like to discuss in contract negotiations. But as you all know, and I am being extremely kind here, DCPS has a pattern of delayed responses and protracted timelines. They ignored the Chairman's call in February to get a new agreement done before September 30th, and they are disregarding a unanimously approved resolution by the state Board of Education for DCPS to get a deal done.

In August, the WTU conducted a survey of its members on school violence that revealed a very troubling reality: There is extensive student-on-student violence and other violent and traumatic events happening in our schools.

- Nearly half of the respondents—42 percent—said workplace violence has increased a lot in their schools within the past year.
- 55 percent said they witnessed assaults, 70 percent said they heard physical threats and 73 percent saw slaps, punching or kicking.
- 49 percent said they have experienced sadness and depression because of the impact of violent behavior they have witnessed.
 - 45 percent said they considered leaving the profession because of the problems.
- And yet, despite all of this, 82 percent said they do not receive adequate training to address workplace assaults. And 71 percent said there aren't enough counselors or social service support for students in their school.

We're not the only ones saying there are practical approaches that can be implemented to improve school safety. The highly respected Learning Policy Institute recently came out with a report offering strategies to increase schools' physical security and build supportive school communities, including offering more mental health supports.

DCPS cannot continue to ignore the issue and the efforts by the Washington Teachers' Union and others to address "urgent" school safety issues. This should be a no-brainer for an administration that is supposed to put safety above all else. The community is holding this administration accountable and we want action.

###