



Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2A

“Serving the Foggy Bottom and West End communities of Washington, D.C.”

October 30, 2020

Chancellor Lewis Ferebee
Chancellor
DC Public Schools
1200 First Street NW
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Lewis.Ferebee@k12.dc.gov

Councilmember David Grosso
Chair, Committee on Education
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 402
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RE: Personnel Matters at the School Without Walls at Francis-Stevens and School Without Walls High School

Dear Chancellor Ferebee and Councilmember Grosso,

At its regular meeting on October 21, 2020, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2A (“ANC 2A” or “Commission”) considered the above-referenced matter. With six of six commissioners present, a quorum at a duly-noticed public meeting, the Commission voted unanimously (6-0-0), after a motion made by Commissioner Harnett and seconded by Commissioner Kennedy, to adopt the following resolution:

WHEREAS, School Without Walls High School (SWWHS) and School Without Walls at Francis-Stevens (SWWFS) are both located in Ward 2, and the high school campus is within the boundaries of ANC 2A,

WHEREAS, Richard Trogisch has served as principal of SWWHS, the highest performing high school in the District, since 2006. The school is ranked second in the region, among the top 75 high schools in the nation, according to U.S. News & World Report, and a two-time Blue Ribbon Schools award winner that is majority-minority with students from all eight wards,

WHEREAS, Richard Trogisch also 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 through grade 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,

WHEREAS, both schools, representing 1,200 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 that should be the envy and goal of every school in America,

WHEREAS, on Monday, October 5th, 2020, the Mayor announced plans to re-open schools in the coming weeks, and, at a Chancellor’s meeting, Principal Trogisch asked specifically what air quality standards were being set by the DC



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Public Schools (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 students, teachers, and all other school personnel would be safe,

WHEREAS, 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,

WHEREAS, within the past week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) revised its guidance to acknowledge that COVID-19 is spread not just by droplets, but in aerosolized form in closed indoor spaces with poor ventilation and that regular exchange of fresh air is imperative for such spaces to be safe, especially where people, such as students and teachers in classrooms, stay in those spaces for more than just a few minutes at a time,

WHEREAS, the student body at SWWFS includes students with disabilities, including students with 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, and the health and safety of students and personnel must be the highest priority and that is non-negotiable,

WHEREAS, less than 48 hours after Principal Trogisch questioned whether the air quality and ventilation standards at SWWFS 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” in a previous year,

WHEREAS, DCPS officials openly admitted to the school community that the firing of Principal Trogisch was “not in the best interests” of students and faculty, and

WHEREAS, when considering the timing of the firing of Principal Trogisch within hours of his bringing up health and safety issues, the reason given by DCPS appears to be an implausible pretext, straining all credulity.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that ANC 2A joins a majority of DC councilmembers in demanding answers from Chancellor Ferebee to questions regarding the firing of an honored, respected, and beloved educator.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that ANC 2A demands to know what air quality standards and ventilation (air exchange) standards will be used by DCPS to determine whether schools and individual classrooms can reopen safely, and



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demands to know how those standards will be measured and enforced before schools are allowed to reopen.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that ANC 2A demands that DCPS immediately engages 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-19, at even further risk.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that ANC 2A urges the DC Council to 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.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that ANC 2A demands that Principal Richard Trogisch be reinstated at once to his duties. The fact that he was willing to risk his career rather than put at risk the health and safety of his students, teachers, and staff is at the heart of this matter, and 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.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that ANC 2A demands that since SWWHS and SWWFS have 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 must come from within their ranks.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this resolution be considered a vote of no confidence in the leadership of Chancellor Lewis Ferebee and all other DCPS officials directly involved in the termination of Richard Trogisch. It should be noted that School Without Walls High School is the closest public school in America to the White House, and the transparently cruel methods of silencing and terminating a whistleblower do not represent to our nation the values of the citizens of the District of Columbia, nor the concern that we have for our children and educators that our schools be reopened safely.

Commissioners James Harnett (2A08@anc.dc.gov) and Patrick Kennedy (2A01@anc.dc.gov) are the Commission’s representatives in this matter.



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ON BEHALF OF THE COMMISSION.

Sincerely,

James Harnett
Chairperson