



NEW YORK CITY COMPTROLLER **SCOTT M. STRINGER**



WWW.COMPTROLLER.NYC.GOV

1 CENTRE STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10007



2020-21 Back to School Guide

Typically, the first day of school is full of excitement and joyful anticipation. Children are eager to reconnect with friends, meet their teacher, and enter into the familiar routines of the school year. This year, of course, is very different. This September, our City continues to persevere through one of the most challenging periods in modern history: the ongoing public health crisis of COVID-19, the economic shutdown of the City that resulted in devastating unemployment, and the rising tide of anger over criminal justice practices and the deep inequities that plague low-income New Yorkers. It is in this environment that we are preparing to return to school, whether in physically distanced classrooms as part of blended learning, or exclusively through laptops and iPads as a continuation of remote learning.

In spite of these challenges, we need to ensure that all children receive a high-quality education and are set up for academic success. To do this, we must guarantee that students receive the special education or English language learner services they need, that students experiencing homelessness have support to succeed academically, and that all schools provide programming in arts, physical education, and health. My office will be carefully watching the return to school and continuing to advocate for students and their families.

Follow Us

- Attend our heritage events and public meetings.
- Get updates on agency audits and the pension fund.
- Learn about our policy initiatives.



@NYCComptroller



@scottstringernyc



NYCComptroller

I also want to express my deepest gratitude to all the teachers, staff, principals, and administrators who have been working tirelessly to adapt to new ways of teaching and learning. Our educators have stepped up these past few months to support our students in and out of the classroom, advocate for safer reopening conditions, and serve their communities. Their efforts, hard work, and creativity under pressure set a remarkable example, alongside the immense efforts of parents and guardians who are supporting children learning from home.

Together we are heading into uncharted territory, and there may be bumps along the road. I am a parent of two elementary school students, and share many of your concerns and questions as we prepare to return to learning. It will not be easy, but let's remember: we are in this together. Please know that my office is here to support you. For more information or help with any school-related questions, you can contact my office at (212) 669-3916.

Let's all have a safe and successful school year!



Scott M. Stringer
New York City Comptroller

Parent Organizations & Family Engagement

Involved parents make schools stronger, and our schools need parents' unique perspective and understanding now more than ever. During this period of transition, it is paramount that schools communicate frequently and transparently with student's families to make sure they are aware of pressing health and academic information.

There are many ways to become involved in your child's school, communicate with teachers and administrators on a regular basis, and discuss specific opportunities relevant to your child. You can learn how to contact your school's parent coordinator and other ways to engage by visiting the [DOE's Family Empowerment](#) page.



Photo Credit: Prostock-studio/Shutterstock

The New York City Department of Education has also developed the [Return to School 2020](#) page to serve as a hub for information and updates as the school year begins. Please contact your school directly with any questions that are specific to your child's education or refer to your child's [NYC Schools Account](#).

Most schools have the following organizations for parent involvement:

- Parents Association (PA) / Parent Teacher Association (PTA)
- School Leadership Team (SLT)
- School Wellness Council
- [Citywide and Community Education Councils \(CECs\)](#)

Each school district has a Community Education Council that serves as an advisory body to the Chancellor and the Panel for Educational Policy. CECs meet monthly to discuss the state of schools in the district and to advise and shape educational policies that support student achievement. There are also four Citywide Education Councils: High School, English Language Learners, Special Education and District 75.

Health, Safety, and Cleaning Guidance



Photo Credit: FamVeld/Shutterstock

Minimizing the risk of returning to in-person learning is one of the most important tasks we face as a City. All schools, public and private, are subject to guidance issued by New York State on reopening school buildings. State safety guidelines require that schools perform regular health screenings, manage and isolate anyone who is sick until they can go home, require face masks or other coverings, ensure proper hand-washing and respiratory hygiene practices, and promote physical distancing by reducing class sizes and or adapting the way building space is used or configured.

Staff, students, and visitors will be screened daily for symptoms. In order to limit the number of visitors in a school building in accordance with CDC recommendations, schools are being asked to

address parent and caregiver concerns over the phone or virtually. When an in-person meeting is necessary, visitor control protocols should be in place, including undergoing a temperature check, completing a health screening form, complying with physical distancing requirements and wearing a face covering.

The DOE has committed to inspecting every classroom across the city prior to the start of the year to ensure they meet air filtration and ventilation safety standards. The DOE will make necessary improvements to HVAC systems, air conditioning units, windows, and filters to improve air circulation. Rooms without adequate ventilation will not be occupied by students or staff. You can find the results of DOE inspections [here](#).

For district public schools, specific health safety protocols can be reviewed on the [Department of Education website](#). The DOE has also developed the [Back to School Pledge](#), which outlines specific health and safety measures they are guaranteeing. Independent, charter and private schools have developed health, safety, and cleaning protocols that are aligned with state guidance. You should ask your school's principal to review a copy of their reopening plans.

Health and safety protocols for Catholic schools in Manhattan, the Bronx, and Staten Island can be seen on the website of the [Archdiocese of New York](#). Protocols for Catholic schools in Brooklyn and Queens can be viewed on the website of the [Diocese of Brooklyn](#).

COVID-19 Testing

Ten to twenty percent of students, teachers, and staff at each school will be randomly tested each month. If selected, taking the test will be mandatory to enter school buildings. If you or your child are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath, contact your healthcare provider or telehealth program right away. If anyone in your household is experiencing symptoms associated with COVID-19, your child should not attend school.

New York City recommends that all New Yorkers are tested regularly, whether or not an individual is experiencing symptoms or is at increased risk. All New York City teachers and school staff members are encouraged to be tested for COVID-19 in the days before the first day of school. School staff will be given priority access at the 34 city-run testing locations.

To find a testing location closest to you, go to the [citywide COVID-19 information portal](#).

Attendance Matters

Regular attendance and engagement in schools is important for student success, especially during remote learning. Absences or reluctance to engage with school and teachers can be a sign that a child is dealing with other issues such as difficulty with school work, bullying, or having trouble with their teacher. Regular absenteeism is one of the leading predictors of students dropping out of high school and missing even one or two days every few weeks is considered chronic absenteeism.

This school year, New York City public schools will take attendance each day for students in school and those in remote learning. Each school is also encouraged to assign an advisor to act as a daily point of contact with your child for attendance purposes. You can also talk to your child's teacher/s directly if you have concerns about daily attendance and engagement with learning.

Parents and families are critical in building good attendance habits for students. Talk to your children about the importance of attending school or engaging in their school work each day. For more information and resources on how to help your student build habits of attendance and engagement, even during remote learning, visit [Attendance Works](#).



Photo Credit: Hananeko Studio/Shutterstock

Virtual Learning



Photo Credit: Juliya Shangarey/Shutterstock

All public school families have a choice for how their student will learn during the upcoming year. Families can select to have their student continue to learn remotely full-time in the 2020-21 school year. For families that would prefer their children return to in-person learning, the Department of Education has adopted a blended model of education with instruction split between in-person and remote learning. Families who choose the fully remote option may transfer back into a blended model that includes in-person instruction at specific points during the school year. While learning remotely, students will receive a combination of live instruction and independent work.

As remote learning becomes a greater part of our educational experience, students and families need the

tools to navigate the suite of devices, learning platforms, and technology that schools will use. Here are some resources that can help families support their child and build technological fluency to facilitate a smooth experience with remote instruction:

- The DOE has created a [website](#) with information on how to use common digital learning tools including [iPads](#), [iLearnNYC](#), [Google Classroom](#), [Zoom](#), and [Microsoft Teams](#).
- InsideSchools has launched a new online support community for NYC parents called [InsideSchools+](#), which includes a free online class called "[How to Support Online Learning at Home](#)." The mobile-friendly class features tons of information for families about how to prepare for online learning in NYC this fall.
- The Child Mind Institute offers [guidelines and strategies](#) from experts to help families support their children's remote education at this time.
- [NYC Wi-Fi Hotspot Locations Map](#) shows locations where students can use their device to access free Wi-Fi.

Contact Us: Community Action Center (212) 669-3916

Office of the New York City Comptroller, 1 Centre Street, New York, NY 10007

There are a number of other places to you can find free tools and resources to support your child's educational development:

[iLearnNYC](#) is an online learning portal designed to broaden and enhance your school's course offerings. It is available to all K–12 New York City schools.

[Brainfuse from the New York Public Library](#) offers free online homework help from live tutors, daily from 2–11 PM. Available in English and Spanish, from early elementary through high school grades, in core subject areas. Video content and other resources are also available 24 hours a day.

[NOVEL New York](#) is an online library of magazines, newspapers, maps, charts, research and reference books that are available to every New Yorker, free of charge.

[Brooklyn Public Library Digital Resources](#) has a range of free articles, streaming video and interactive learning tools that students and families can access from home.

[Khan Academy](#) offers free practice exercises, instructional videos, and a personalized learning dashboard to support students outside of the classroom.

Mental Health & Emotional Wellness

COVID-19 drastically changed life for New York City students. With the abrupt transition to remote learning in the final months of the school year, students were separated from their school communities – friends, teachers, supports and meals at school, not to mention sports and afterschool clubs and activities – causing many students to experience a sense of enormous loss. Students have been denied many of the markers of their hard-earned progress from the last school year: moving up ceremonies, year-end celebrations, class trips, field day, prom, and graduation. For some, the loss of routines is in addition to deep trauma stemming from illness, death, grief, or unstable or even violent lives at home.



Photo Credit: fizkes/Shutterstock

Many students whose lives and families have been impacted by COVID-19 have experienced emotional trauma, particularly those who had mental health needs prior to the pandemic. For these students, schools offer emotional stability and a place to access necessary mental health supports. Many schools are preparing for these challenges by dedicating the first weeks of the school year to providing social and emotional support for students as part of any in-person school reopening plan.

While services vary by school, all public schools offer some mental health supports. Ask your Parent Coordinator, School Social Worker, or Guidance Counselor for more information about your school's mental health program. You can learn more about the types of services available at your child's school [here](#) and through the following resources.

- [Telehealth services](#) are available for families through community-based providers.
- [NYC Well](#) is a confidential mental health information and referral line with access to mobile crisis teams staffed by trained social workers 24 hours a day, 7 days per week, 365 days per year. Interpretation services are offered for 200+ languages. To get immediately help, text "WELL" to 65173, call 1-888-NYC-WELL (692-9355), or [chat now](#).
- The [Child Mind Institute](#), [National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health](#), [Children's Mental Health Campaign](#), and [KidsHealth from Nemours](#) have clear information and resources from leading experts in child mental health.
- A list of mental health resources by borough from Weill Cornell Medicine can be found [here](#).
- [The Motherhood Center of New York](#) has counseling, support groups, and resources for mothers.

Special Education Services



Photo Credit: Andrii Zastrozhnov/Shutterstock

All students are legally entitled to a free and appropriate education. For students with disabilities, any necessary services they require as part of their education are documented in an Individualized Education Program (IEP), a legal document describing how the school system will provide them with their educational rights under law. It is the responsibility of the Department of Education to provide these services and to ensure students with disabilities are accommodated alongside nondisabled peers wherever possible. During school closures related to COVID-19, IEP meetings will continue remotely, either over video or phone.

A parent may request that their child be referred for evaluation for special education services. If you believe your child is not receiving adequate or appropriate services, you may request a hearing to challenge the determination.

For more information, visit:

- The New York City Department of Education's pages about [special education and the IEP process](#), and [resources for students with disabilities and remote learning](#).
- [IncludeNYC](#) has resources on remote learning and school for families with children with disabilities.
- [Advocates for Children of New York City](#) offers guides and resources for students with disabilities and special education.
- [Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of New York](#) guidance and resources for parents of students with special learning needs.
- [New York Metro Parents Guide to Special Needs Resources](#) has a database cataloging resources available by location.

Multilingual Learners & English Language Learners

Schools are required to provide multilingual students and English language learners supports in their home language in all content areas. Students will be served in the 2020-2021 school year according to their English language proficiency level from the 2019-2020 school year. If a language other than English is spoken in your home, the school may give your child the New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners to determine whether your child needs language support. If so, he or she will be designated as an English Language Learner (ELL) and placed in an ELL program.

Parents have the right to receive all important school information in their primary language, as well as oral interpretation at meetings, orientations and hearings. To request interpretation, contact your school's Parent Coordinator or Principal.



Photo Credit: Aysezgicmeli/Shutterstock

Here are some additional resources to support multilingual learners:

- The DOE has compiled [resources for multilingual learners](#), including [translated support for remote learning](#), information for [English Language Learners](#), and additional [helpful links](#).
- There are [community organizations](#) in each borough that support multilingual learners.
- [New York State United Teachers: Ensuring Success for English Language Learners](#)
- Advocates for Children offers a guide for [Translation and Interpretation Services in New York City Public Schools](#) and for [Immigrant Families](#).

Child Care



Photo Credit: L Julia/Shutterstock

DOE Learning Bridges

New York City will provide up to 100,000 children with free child care if they are enrolled in blended learning at their school. Program slots will be available for children in grades K-8, in groups of no more than 15 children. Programming will be provided by community-based organizations and other cultural institutions. Additionally, early childhood programming will be available for three- and four-year olds who are not enrolled in remote learning. More information can be found on the [Learning Bridges](#) page of the DOE website.

Child Care

Child care programs in New York City are currently open. Facilities are required to follow new [health guidelines](#), which include protocols for distancing, hygiene, activities, protective equipment, and screening. Families have a number of different child care options available to them:

- [Child Care Connect](#) is the best place to start your search for a child care facility that meets your needs.
- [NYC Pre-K Finder](#) can help you find free programs for three-year-olds and four-year-olds through 3-K for All and Pre-K for All.
- New York City provides a number of free or low-cost [EarlyLearn](#) programs for families that qualify.