

WHEREAS the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on students and families across the city of New York, causing over 21,000 deaths, leaving countless people out of work, facing food insecurity, and causing severe disruption to daily life;

WHEREAS as a result of the pandemic, the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) closed all public schools, and implemented distance learning leading to many inequities amidst the students in our city;

WHEREAS many children are not able to thrive in distance learning, including students who were already experiencing an achievement gap, English language learners, students with IEPs, younger learners (preK-2nd grade), students with housing instability and food insecurity, students whose homes are unsafe, and students with mental health concerns;

WHEREAS it is expected that the populations most vulnerable in the current pandemic are also the populations most likely to have a high rate of attendance at schools, due to lack of choice, largely in communities of color;

WHEREAS there is precedent of outdoor classrooms from historical public health concerns such as the Tuberculosis outbreaks in early 20th century and the 1918 H1N1 Influenza pandemic, as well as, during current pandemic, in Europe & Asia, where many schools have taken their classrooms outside to reduce the spread disease;

WHEREAS emerging science on COVID-19 shows that the transmission rate of the virus is significantly higher indoors than outdoors and therefore, parents, teachers and administrators alike acknowledge the fact that indoor classrooms can be dangerous due to the unique spread of COVID-19;

WHEREAS there is growing support from parents, teachers and organizations, namely Green Schoolyards America, National Wildlife Federation, GrowNYC, D3 Green Schools Group, as well as across the city and the country, for the concept of outdoor classrooms due to this understanding of lower transmission rates outdoors;

WHEREAS there is a large depository of research available and many published news articles that encourage outdoor classrooms as a safe and healthy alternative to a full indoor day of classes;

WHEREAS NYC has afforded creative solutions for restaurants to move outside as a mitigating factor during the pandemic response and such use of outdoor space in our schools may allow to bring students back to school sooner or more often, leading to more in-person instruction;

WHEREAS current plans for NYC reopening do not include use of outdoor space and have eliminated recess, PE and lunch from the daily activities;

WHEREAS the actual start date for schools are not yet known as data continues to emerge;

WHEREAS NYS Regents recommendations include that social-emotional needs should be top priority for students for this coming school year;

WHEREAS many psychological and educational theories attest to the healing power of time in nature;

WHEREAS the key drivers for outdoor learning during the COVID-19 pandemic include increased capacity and flexibility in physical space, reduced transmission rates of the virus, allowance for physical movement through the course of the school day and social emotional benefit of time in nature.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that CEC3 strongly encourages the NYC DOE to pursue use of outdoor spaces to execute any and all daily classroom activities with an expectation to identify space for 30% of student enrollment to be outside at any given time;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that CEC3 calls for equity among all schools in the implementation of outdoor classrooms so that all students are given the opportunity for time outdoors on all days for which they are physically in attendance;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that CEC3 requests that the NYC DOE initiate a feasibility study of all District 3 school buildings to specify which buildings have rooftop access and/or potential for access; playground and/or yard space on school grounds; close proximity park or yard space, and potential for street closure space;

BE IT RESOLVED that CEC3 calls upon lawmakers to set aside funds to make outdoor classrooms feasible for all schools in the city;

BE IT RESOLVED that NYC DOE establish plans for less than ideal weather, including use of tents or other canopies, space heaters, extra clothing etc. These plans should also include contingencies for severe weather which would include standards for schedule changes and closures.