

# P.S. 321

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## SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TEAM

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February 1, 2021

Dear Mayor de Blasio,

We are writing to you to address the dire financial situation that our school, PS321 William Penn School, is facing due to student register losses brought on by the COVID19 pandemic. Although we are giving the example of our school, we are well aware that many schools across the city face a similar situation, and this letter is written on behalf of all of them.

Under the Department of Education's current rules, PS 321 is required to return at least \$503,474 in funding due to its share of an unprecedented, city-wide drop in student enrollment. By eliminating one part-time position and reducing other budget lines, PS321 was able to come up with about \$50,000 that we have already returned to the DOE - but the rest remains a liability, based upon circumstances that were both unanticipated and completely beyond our control.

It is unconscionable that in the midst of the extraordinary challenges our school is facing, the DOE should demand that our school - or any city school - return funding "owed" due to student enrollment loss. We believe that this request from the DOE is particularly myopic given that schools have been required to maintain and expand their programming and their staff in order to keep our children educated and safe.

More specifically, over the past year, PS321, like all schools, has incurred additional expenses in order to maintain social distancing requirements. Unlike in a normal academic year, where student attrition may lead to reduction of teachers, we are unable to operate with fewer teachers now since we need smaller class sizes in order to adhere to the classroom guidelines set by the DOE and the CDC. Additionally, PS321 has had to spend \$45,000 in excess of its anticipated budget on needed technology and other COVID19 related expenses.

Our school's staff is putting in herculean efforts to educate our children and to keep them healthy. If the DOE were to prevail in its repayment demand, it would have an immeasurable, negative effect on the 1,212 students at PS321, and would have follow-on effects for years to come. The repayment of this funding would force PS321 to increase class size, cut teacher positions and programs, and to tap into funding for enrichment and intervention programs that are absolutely critical to students. These cuts will come at a time when childrens' social, emotional and academic needs are most acute, and more funding will be needed in September 2021 to meet these needs, not less. No school in New York City should be asked to start the next school year with a deficit.

On January 14th, you stated that schools “have to come back in September, fully” and highlighted the importance of “addressing [students’] needs, their emotional needs, which are so intense right now.” How does our city intend to meet the emotional, social and academic needs of our students and make up for the lost time of the past one and a half academic years, if schools go into the next year with insurmountable financial and staffing gaps? PS321 will not be able to meet your pledge if it is required to repay the DOE due to pandemic-related student register losses.

The COVID19 pandemic has cost our city thousands of lives and has massively disrupted our children’s education. We respectfully request that the repayment requested from PS321 - and from all public schools - be rescinded for the current year and that the city work with all of us to cancel or minimize this liability for the next budget year. The students at PS321 and across NYC deserve nothing less.

Respectfully,

The PS321 School Leadership Team

The PS321 Parent Teacher Association

Cc: Chancellor Richard Carranza  
Deputy Chancellor Donald Conyers  
Deputy Chancellor Josh Wallack  
Superintendent Anita Skop  
Brad Lander  
Robert Carroll  
Mark Treyger