



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Sanders Jr.

## Labor Unions, UFT, Say NYC Schools are Dangerously Unprepared to Reopen, During a Community Conversation Hosted by NYS Senator James Sanders Jr.

JAMES SANDERS JR. August 28, 2020



In response to growing concerns by the community that city schools are not properly prepared to re-open in September, Senator James Sanders Jr. hosted a community conversation on the subject on Facebook Live on August 26, 2020. All stakeholders including parents, teachers, administrators, students and labor unions were invited to participate, express their concerns and ask their questions.

The consensus among the school superintendents from School Districts 27, 28, 29 and 75 as well as the Executive Superintendent for Queens South and the Superintendent of Queens South High Schools was that they would serve the students and ensure the safety of the students to the best of their ability given the resources at their disposal and following the guideline set forth by the Mayor's Office and the NYC Department of Education. They remained cautiously optimistic that things would go smoothly.

Mayor Bill de Blasio said that all classrooms would be sanitized before schools open and that city inspectors would examine the ventilation systems in all classrooms this week to ensure that fresh air limits the spread of the coronavirus. The mayor also announced that schools can use outdoor spaces, including streets and parks to help with social distancing. In addition, when schools open they will follow a blended model of learning, a mix of in-person days at school and remote-learning days at home.

The Labor unions who participated in the discussion - Local 372 and the United Federation of Teachers were not so positive. In fact they believe that schools are dangerously unprepared to open in the fall, claiming that the city has no real concrete plan for re-opening safely, and that they are gambling with the student's safety.

Shaun D. Francois, President of Board of Education Employees Local 372, said that the schools are not ready to open and that the DOE has not been forthright when it comes to safety conditions. "This is not a joke," he said. "You are dealing with peoples' kids here, lives here, safety here. This is not trial and error - You don't wait to see what happens and then decide what to do after that. We're not guinea pigs. We have major sanitation issues. They can't even get soap in the dispensers in the bathrooms. If you can't do that, how are you going to handle something major."

The UFT, who was represented at Senator Sanders discussion, by Queens Special Representative Dermot Smyth, said the union has a clear and detailed plan on its website that it wishes the city would follow and that the UFT believes that a staggered reopening of schools instead of a unilateral opening would be a more sensible choice. The UFT's plan is available [HERE](#).

Senator Sanders said he would be speaking with the Mayor in the coming days to convey the communities concerns, which included a lack of windows and sinks in schools, a lack of nurses, outdoor learning in neighborhoods where shootings have recently occurred, a lack of preparedness to enforce social distancing among kindergarten age children and students with special needs, and much more.

The entire community conversation can be viewed on YouTube at the link below  
<https://youtu.be/kHkocypygZc>