

HUNTER COLLEGE CAMPUS SCHOOLS

MIHI CURA FUTURI The Care of the Future is Mine



October 3, 2020

Dear Chancellor Matos-Rodriguez,

We, the faculty of Hunter College Campus Schools, wish to inform you of our recent votes of no confidence in our administrators: President Jennifer Raab, Director Lisa Siegmann, Principal Tony Fisher, and Principal Dawn Roy. This letter serves as an explanation of our vote and an articulation of faculty sentiment. We have been dismissed by our leadership in a time of national crisis, our trust in them has been lost, and we see no other way for our community to heal other than to call for their resignation.

The definition of “no confidence” was clear and discussed in the faculty meeting before our vote and this is what was written on the ballot itself: “The purpose of a no confidence vote is to allow the faculty to express or record its opinion regarding their administration's leadership. A vote of no confidence is a request for a resignation. A vote of no confidence is a statement of the sense of the faculty. The vote is not binding but will be recorded to the Chancellor of the City University of New York (CUNY).”

1. **President Raab of Hunter College.**

There was a 96% vote by faculty of the campus schools to call for the resignation of President Raab.

With power comes responsibility. Since March of this year, President Raab has instructed the administration of the campus schools not to prepare a plan to open the school in September. She reserved the power to do this to herself. Unfortunately, she kept this ban in place until mid-July, at which point she informed the administration that she would be giving them the Silberman building as well as the 94th Street building and that they must fill these locations with students, preferably full time.

The faculty and union asked very clearly to be included in all opening plans: they sent letters to administration, including Raab, in June. These letters were ignored, faculty was stonewalled, and plans were formed by the administration together with the department chairs of the high school, and alone by the principal of the elementary school.

Requests from the faculty for participation and health and safety assurances were ignored, and the administration was forbidden from speaking with faculty representatives: the union. The faculty's

requests turned into demands. The faculty wrote over [80 letters to the administration](#)¹, including Raab, asking for, and demanding, inclusion in the pedagogical plans and health and safety plans. These were not even acknowledged by any administrators for weeks while they continued to stonewall. Raab has still not acknowledged receipt or acknowledged that she has read a single one of these letters.

Raab met once with the union for a half hour, at the end of which she actively refused to guarantee health and safety of the faculty, students, staff, and parents. It was only after we filed for a temporary restraining order and we began to assess whether the faculty was willing to strike that Raab began substantial discussions with the union (the faculty's only representatives). That restraining order was over the installation of real HEPA filters in classrooms; Raab outright lied about whether this had been done. In a letter to our union president dated 9/15, she wrote, "HEPA filters have been installed in classrooms in both buildings." The truth is, the devices that had been installed did not filter air, were not HEPA-equivalent, and had no record of effectiveness against COVID-19. True HEPA filters were only ordered on September 21st, the day our union filed our lawsuit and T.R.O. request with the courts. The judge granted our T.R.O. forcing Raab to comply with Hunter's reopening plan and install true HEPA filters in all our classrooms.

Another example of Raab's stonewalling on the issue of health, she refused to allow an airflow check of the Silberman building until it became clear that the faculty/union inspector would be doing one (or we would go on strike). Then she delayed the opening of that building for the 9th and 10th graders while CUNY workers did an airflow check in the 11th hour (on 9/29, 9/30, and 10/2), and then instructed Director Siegmann to blame the faculty for the delay (which Siegmann did, falsely).

All of the above would be enough to justify "no confidence," but Raab, as the leader of the institution, is also responsible for what is detailed below, particularly what was done by her chief subordinate, Director Siegmann.

We may imagine, for the sake of contrast, an inclusive leader who would seek consensus, someone whose understanding of leadership includes careful listening, responsiveness, give and take, transparency, and most of all, advocacy for those whom she leads. We understand proper administration to serve those below them, to smooth the path for employees doing the important work of educating children, to assure them, and to respect them by including their experience and creativity in pedagogical adaptations to these difficult circumstances. That is the sort of person we wish for in this position, and it is close to the opposite of what we have.

There is an irony in the partial success of the two buildings in passing the hard-fought union-sponsored, union-financed inspections this past week (these locations are not 100% ready for use at the time of this writing). The irony lies in how much time was wasted, because of bad leadership, in fighting to prevent these inspections that were permitted in all other NYC public schools. Raab and Siegmann have systematically blamed the faculty for delays that have arisen due to the need to inspect the buildings, but the responsibility for this falls squarely on them, and on the CUNY administrators such as Hector Batista, for refusing a reasonable request until enough pressure was put on them to allow it. But regardless of the role of CUNY central in this debacle, Raab bears responsibility for refusing to advocate for us, for refusing to inform us even of who we might need to persuade to allow inspections to move forward. She has damaged our school community in the process and we ask that she leave so that we can heal.

¹ https://docs.google.com/document/d/14o_8lZ0M5q5o6FMDMUekvTDpPRnM8-HNxdWF-kTAg/edit?usp=sharing

Finally, we faculty have had to spend an enormous amount of energy fighting for our lives, and the lives of parents, staff, and children. While we were doing this, we still sought out, even begged our administration for professional development and discussions about the invisible pedagogy of the hybrid plan, yet we were denied. We have never had the chance for a full discussion of the hybrid teaching plans developed without us. We demand that discussion, even as we know that Raab and those who think they must serve her (only) will seek to squelch it. Such leadership hurts students, and that, again, is the opposite of the job description.

2. Director Lisa Siegmann

73% of faculty voted no confidence in Director Siegmann.

Our school community is in a crisis of its own making. In mid-July, past the date of recklessness, the Raab administration handed our local administrators, headed by Lisa Siegmann, a completed plan with no room for adjustment or discussion with a faculty that had been demanding consultation since early June. The plan was ill-conceived, secretive, and would certainly cause big problems for faculty-administration cooperation. The Director and two principals, at that moment, faced a crossroads. They could have resisted or handed in their resignations, all together, explaining that the plan was poor and that faculty would need consultation or it would be impossible to implement. They might have seen that Raab was failing them by giving them the choice of bulldozing their faculty and manipulating the parents, or defying her. Other Directors and principals have pushed back against Raab in the past. Our three administrators knew the history that led to the faculty vote of no confidence in Raab a decade ago, when she made the position of high school principal untenable with her meddling.

This summer was a moment that called for real leadership from the three administrators, and courage. Instead of showing these, they threw themselves into implementing Raab's plan. No one did this more assiduously than the Director. She understood her task as prime public relations coordinator. Health and safety would have to be sacrificed to the appearance of health and safety. Rather than Siegmann communicating to faculty that the request of an inspection was reasonable and she would advocate on the faculty's behalf, Director Siegmann invalidated the faculty's request and told the full faculty that we would have to deal with the fact that "we can't always get what we want."

The faculty's dislike of the lack of a clear pedagogical rationale to the opening plan would be met with stoical disregard. The Director sent misinformation to the parents about health and safety, cherry-picking some facts and misrepresenting others. When the conflict with the union and faculty (same body) intensified, Siegmann took it upon herself, with Raab's approval, to put down this unrest by attacking faculty before the parents. She has called the faculty "fear-mongers" to a set of elementary school parents. Raab offered, then capriciously withdrew, the 68th street buildings for use by the campus schools; Siegmann then sent a letter to the parents casting blame for the withdrawal on the faculty, who were not even consulted. Siegmann has practiced spin instead of transparency. She evidently conceives of herself as conducting a campaign against faculty for the hearts and minds of the parents who would be deciding whether to send children in to the two remaining buildings. These many hostile communications, done in the service of a plan she ought to have resisted in order to facilitate faculty involvement, have instead burned her bridges to the faculty. We do not know whose error it was to purchase air purifiers with no efficacy in removing viruses from the air, instead of the HEPA filters specifically listed in the official school opening plan, but surely Siegmann and Raab bear responsibility for not making sure the correct items were installed. This move cost the school the

shame of being slapped with a temporary restraining order, which we understand is rarely granted in the courts.

Once again, we imagine something different. The Director is supposed to be a liaison between the various stakeholders of the school community, students, families, teachers, staff, administrators, and alumni. We imagine an advocate for faculty such as described above; someone to create the right conditions for teachers to do their jobs to the best of their abilities, someone who would bring parents and teachers together in the common cause of fostering learning for the children, and someone who would bring parents, teachers, alumni, and staff together in a larger community. Siegmann has acted as if she has a constituency of only President Raab. She has used parent interests as a power bloc against faculty. She has, as a result, divided the parents against one another. The PTA executive board no longer represents the feeling of close to half of the parents, according to our best understanding. The other half of the parents now hold great hostility toward the faculty partly due to Siegmann's false characterization of them.

The faculty is united as never before, but against a common set of adversaries, people who ought to be our defenders.

Over [1000 alumni added their voices](#) of criticism against this administration during the last months and are therefore also caught up in this conflict of the administration's making. For the school community to heal, Siegmann cannot remain in place.

3. Tony Fisher, High School Principal

Fisher received a 60% vote of no confidence from the high school faculty.

The case of the principals is different. They are lowest on the line of administrators tasked with implementation of the plans imposed on our community and thus bear less responsibility than those above them. Some of the faculty have felt that Fisher and Roy ought to be spared from blame for our current ongoing crisis. However, to say they had zero degrees of freedom in this implementation is untrue.

Principal Fisher has consistently ignored faculty calls for reduced interactions and has ignored best practices of health and safety in the COVID moment. He has zealously sought to increase cohort sizes, to mix cohorts, to have different cohorts using the same room one after the other, to increase interactions between teachers and students with no scientific or pedagogical discussion with faculty to justify them. Fisher has made light of safety on tours with teachers and in student orientations, specifically on the issue of wearing a mask, and has stated outright that he considers guidelines published by the Center for Disease Control to be optional if inconvenient.

Fisher has stubbornly refused to engage with faculty opinion on the pedagogy-free hybrid plan. Perhaps his greatest fault is described above: his having failed the test of true leadership when he chose not to resist the dictates from non-educators and helped to rush those plans into action. The result has been the opposite: delays, resistance, and rage.

The high school faculty are left feeling the void of our principal who, to date, has not met with the faculty other than for 15 minutes on the first day we returned. There were two weeks of Professional Development days followed by two weeks of classes during which there was not one faculty meeting called by Principal Fisher nor Professional Development offered by him.

We imagine a principal with principles, someone to take a stand for us, someone who engages with us, because he knows that doing so is in the interests of the kids and parents also.

4. Dawn Roy, Elementary School Principal

Roy also received a 58% vote of no confidence, but from the elementary school teachers.

When public school principals across the City engaged with faculty throughout the summer, the elementary school (ES) principal did not. On August 12, 2020, the City's Principal's union (CSA) issued a "dire warning" stating that the City's "decision to open for in-person learning on September 10th [was] in disregard of the well-being of our school communities." In spite of this, our ES principal continued to push through an unsafe and deeply flawed plan to reopen HCCS on September 10th.

Principal Roy misrepresented the truth to the parents, for example when she told them faculty received professional development over the summer about remote learning, when we did no such thing; in attempting to present a more robust picture to parents than the reality, she lost faculty's trust. She, much like her high school counterpart, consistently ignored legitimate faculty concerns about health and safety during the COVID pandemic and instead chose to reiterate the view that a "safe" reopening in September was possible.

Rather than consult with the faculty as a whole or with its elected representatives, the ES principal pursued a divisive plan of meeting with individual teachers in brief one-on-one Zoom meetings about "hybrid" learning, essentially attempting to browbeat and cajole them, not to listen to them.

Roy continuously and steadfastly lent direct support to the Director in the telling of misinformation to the parents by repeating it, or by remaining silent. When the Director insisted to parents that teachers had been consulted about the reopening plan, the elementary school principal agreed and cited the one-on-one meetings, for example. When the Director accused the faculty of fear-mongering about the poor state of the school, the ES principal implicitly endorsed this claim with her silence.

Once again, we imagine someone who would have the courage to listen to teachers to discover the best path for children, and who would refuse to participate in faculty disparagement, mistreatment, and exclusion.

Sincerely,

Tina Moore,

Chapter Chair, Professional Staff Congress, Hunter College Campus Schools Chapter, representing the faculty of the Hunter College Campus Schools