Feedback from the Virtual Town Hall:
Do You Really Think It's Safe To Reopen Schools?

On July 8th, six organizations came together for a virtual town hall: UTNO, FFLIC, RETHINK, STEP UP Louisiana, OPEN, and Familias Unidas en Acción. Community feedback was collected during break out sessions, which allowed participants in small groups to voice their concerns and raise questions about the upcoming school year. We want to share these notes publicly in order to continue the conversation, especially as schools will eventually need to recalibrate as they consider transitioning from phase I to phase II. We believe strong and safe decisions are made when we incorporate as many directly impacted voices as possible, including parents, students, teachers, and school staff. We want those making decisions about our lives to read and listen to the comments and concerns of over 300 people in our community. Together we can improve the decisions about teaching and learning for the 2020-2021 school year.

The following questions and concerns were raised based on the communication from NOLA-PS and individual schools at the time. It has been categorized by theme.

General Safety and Voice in Plans:

1) Why are we rushing to reopen? Why have we been focusing on rushing to make three vague plans instead of focusing on improving distance learning? According to Mario from *Familias Unidas*, the Latino community is 100% opposed to reopening.
2) How are schools incorporating community voice and ensuring transparency as they roll out their plans? Who sees the plans first? Who is able to comment or provide feedback? Are these plans being provided in languages that all families understand?
3) If reopening plans are poorly thought, they will exacerbate underlying or ongoing issues related to education such as discipline.
4) What are some actionable steps that could be made from this town hall?
5) Who will monitor and enforce the safety requirements that the schools say they are going to put into place? The City has inspectors roaming and monitoring businesses, prepared to fine and shut them down. Who will do this for the schools?

General Staff Safety & Well-being:

6) How will we ensure older folks working at our schools are safe? Staff with underlying conditions or immunocompromised? Pregnant women? What plans are there to take care of students with asthma or other underlying medical conditions? What about teachers or students who live with family members who are at high risk? Can schools guarantee they will have the necessary PPE supplies available to students, staff, and visitors everyday?
7) Where will the funding come from to keep everyone safe? Are schools going to hire more custodians? Who is responsible for the extra cleaning and the cleaning that must happen in between groups of students? Will teachers be responsible for sanitizing

surfaces and classrooms? If so, how can they be expected to deliver high quality instruction if a bulk of their day will be dedicated to cleaning? Are schools going to hire additional nurses? Currently, some schools only have nurses on site part-time. How will one, part- or full-time nurse be able to check the temperatures of all staff and students on a daily basis?

8) Who is accountable for a safe return to schools? Will health officials regularly monitor school environments for safety? Is there a method for school communities to report breaches in safety protocol?

9) How will teachers be held accountable? Will teachers be reprimanded if they will be tardy or need to stay home? What if a teacher arrives at their school and the safety protocols are not being followed?

10) Can teachers choose to teach solely virtually for their own safety? What about teachers who have children at home or at-risk family members?

11) How will you protect teachers and other staff members, such as social workers, who see multiple groups, sometimes hundreds of students per week, and students who are in multiple classes, or who have specific or individualized schedules? What about service providers, substitutes, enrichment teachers, and other staff who may work part-time or at several different schools, each of which might have a different policy?

12) How can classes such as arts instruction be safe or socially distant (bands, choirs, etc.)? Is it possible for these classes to be safe at all? How do we protect teachers in arts classrooms? Will teachers have access to PPE and hand sanitizer?

13) Will there be ample access to COVID testing? What is the plan for while teachers are waiting for results, which can take up to two weeks?

14) A recent study by Ochsner discovered that 40% of the population that tested positive never exhibited symptoms. How will schools protect the community from spread due to asymptomatic carriers?

15) How do we address children's concerns about the virus and leaving the house? What about students whose loved ones have passed from the virus? How will mental health be addressed? Will there be enough energy, time, and resources needed to properly support mental health for students, families, teachers, staff, and leaders? Will the added stress of health risks affect relationships in the classroom? Will school money be used for counselors instead of police inside schools?

16) Where can we find clear, non-partisan, accurate information about health and safety?

Upholding Safety Protocols with Students:

17) How will students socially distance in classrooms where there is not enough space? When the furniture requires grouping (ie. large tables that sit several students)? When students haven't seen each other? When the youngest learners need social development? When students are playing or participating in age-appropriate social behaviors?

18) Is it developmentally appropriate to expect young students to wear masks all day? Or use their classroom supplies without sharing? How can we effectively teach reading or social emotional regulation when our faces are covered?

19) How should teachers be expected to manage students wearing masks during class or a fight or crisis? Who's going to monitor students in the bathroom for proper sanitation?

What rights do teachers have to enforce mask-wearing if a parent or student refuses? What about students who have exceptionalities and are unable to wear a mask due to sensory or physical difficulties?

20) Will students be protected from discipline related to adhering to safety protocols? Will kids be over-disciplined?

21) What happens when someone tests positive in a school? What happens when a student gets sick? What happens if a teacher's or any stakeholder's family member is sick? Are there enough substitute teachers available to cover those classes? Where do students go if they arrive at school with symptoms? If a parent cannot pick them up?

22) What will the transparency on exposure look like, especially considering HIPAA regulations? Are communities going to be notified if someone is sick in the school community, such as a parent of a student?

23) How will we ensure students are safely riding school buses? Who will monitor social distancing at the bus stops and during the bus ride? Will they need to wake up even earlier in order to accommodate the restrictions on bus capacity?

Virtual Learning:

24) How will we ensure students with limited access to technology or WiFi are able to meaningfully participate? What about families with multiple children, who have limited devices or bandwidth to support multiple students while working themselves? What if I lose my job and my ability to pay for technology mid-quarter? Will technology still be available? There was talk post-Katrina about city wide wifi, is that something that can be discussed?

25) How will I, as a teacher, reach and engage students when in the spring there was limited student participation in distance learning?

26) Will teachers be expected to simultaneously provide in-person as well as virtual instruction? Will distance learning be synchronous or asynchronous? If synchronous, what about students who need to care for siblings or have family roles that prevent them from being available during class time? Will teachers have additional planning periods for preparation and grading, as well as collaboration, considering the extra workload?

27) How will teachers be expected to hold students accountable for work? Particularly if there are policies establishing assignments are not to be graded? Or when students are plagiarizing and copying information from other students?

28) How do teachers create a reliable curriculum that works in distance learning? Will there be more guidance and training for teachers and parents? Can online learning be improved?

29) How will privacy for kids working online and data security be addressed?

Differentiated Instruction:

30) How will we ensure equitable and effective virtual learning for students with learning differences? For students with IEPs or 504 plans, how can we provide services and ensure that they receive the appropriate accommodations and modifications to the

content? What about students who need Spanish or Vietnamese language services or parents who need information translated in order to be involved and up to date?

31) How can districts ensure compliance with IDEA and ADA when planning virtual learning with consideration to items such as blind students who need Braille, deaf students who need ASL interpreters, and students with severe Autism or ADHD who can't sit through virtual instruction? Some students may not have the ability to operate technology or have other underlying issues preventing them to learn under the proposed conditions.
32) How do we effectively implement differentiated and multi-sensory instruction? What is the legality with IEP language if students are home? How do we provide minutes?
33) What policies will be in place to meet the needs of every grade level? Zoom was difficult for young students.

Parent & Family Specific Questions or Concerns:

34) How will parents who have jobs, other duties, or are essential workers manage students who are learning virtually? Will parents receive training on the online platforms used by their students' schools? Will this training be provided in parent's native languages?
35) If schools reopen, what are the legal implications for parents to consider whether or not to send their child back for in-person learning? If they do not agree with their schools' decisions regarding safety, will parents be allowed to change schools without hassle?
36) What if my child care/financial situation as a parent changes, and I need to send my student to school? Parents are being asked to decide now whether they will send their children in person or keep them home for virtual learning, even though some parents are unemployed and don't know if unemployment benefits will be continued at the current levels past the end of July, or family situations will change.

Pay and Other Logistical Matters:

37) Is there enough funding to still pay staff with gaps in tax revenue? What will schools do if a position is unstaffed and what will the impact be?
38) Can school staff apply for workers compensation if they contract the virus at work? What will our PTO look like if I or a family member gets sick? How will we address disability and health accommodations for teachers? Will school staff be offered hazard pay if asked to work in the schools?
39) Will school accountability be waived next year (COMPASS, LEAP, etc)?
40) What will happen with school turnovers or renewal of charters?

Communication with School Leadership:

41) Why weren't community members authentically engaged in the spring during closing or in the planning stages for re-opening during the summer of 2020?

42) Surveys from schools and the school board were limited and ineffective. For instance, the options given on the survey were not always relevant, and they centered middle-class white families and families who have access to technology (surveys were electronic). Leadership needs to elicit more input from students, parents, educators from all levels, not just elementary. End top-down decision making.
43) Communication from schools has been delayed or non-existent, particularly for special ed teachers, service providers, part-time staff, and staff that serve several schools.
44) There was mixed feedback on distance learning.
45) In some situations, schools didn't communicate to students whether they would be re-enrolled or dropped. This uncertainty made it difficult/impossible for students and families to make plans for their future learning.
46) There should be a plan for the whole city, not school by school. Some administrators are not taking this seriously. Some schools have handled it better, have PTO, while some have not.

We intend to keep this conversation going and stand in solidarity with the members of our community affected by school reopening plans. As schools continue planning and eventually consider the move from phase I to phase II, we will continue to make the needs of the community heard, and continue to demand for a safe and equitable learning and working environment for all staff and students.