



Lower Hudson Council of School Superintendents

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November 12, 2021

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul,

We, the 78 superintendents representing the Lower Hudson Council of School Superintendents, thank you for your strong, compassionate leadership and stewardship of our state and public schools during these uncharted times. We appreciate your principled, courageous advocacy to ensure the health and safety of our communities and all New Yorkers.

To support the goal of advancing the health and safety of our students, we are seeking your support for a proposal that could dramatically accelerate the number of vaccinated students in grades kindergarten through 12.

To date, school districts have effectively used layered mitigation strategies with excellent results, and infection rates in public school settings remain extraordinarily low. Since the availability of vaccination for adults, vaccination rates among public school employees and teachers is extremely high. Participation in school athletics, the performing arts, and students attending summer camps has dramatically increased the number of vaccinated students between the ages of 12 and 18.

With the recent emergency use authorization approval of the Pfizer vaccine for students ages 5 through 11, we see an opportunity to incentivize parents to follow the recommendation of the American Academy of Pediatrics to vaccinate students in this age group. There is a divide among parents, many of whom want to have their children vaccinated, and some of whom are reluctant. However, rather than focus on this disagreement, we believe there is a common unifying desire among all parents for students to resume a normalized school experience without the use of face masks as soon as it is safe to do so.

Surrounding states, particularly Connecticut and Massachusetts, have taken a metric-based approach to lift the requirement of indoor mask mandates in school settings. Additionally, both states have implemented Test-to-Stay programs that reduce lost instructional time by testing out of quarantine. We ask that you consider the following proposals similar to the models currently used in Massachusetts. We respectfully propose the following:

1. **Mask Metric** - The New York State Department of Health will establish a required vaccination rate for students, faculty, and staff to safely remove masks in the school setting. Currently, Massachusetts has set a standard of 80% of all faculty, students, and staff to ease and/or remove the mask mandate in schools. We request New York State's medical community and the New York State Department of Health's expertise in setting such a standard.
2. **Test-to-Stay** - Provide a mandated state-level "Test-to-Stay" option that allows an exposed individual to remain in school provided that they (1) remain asymptomatic and (2) receive a negative daily COVID-19 test for a specified number of days following exposure. The "Test-to-Stay" model provides on-site testing before the beginning of a school day for 5 to 7 days after initial exposure. Students who test negative can proceed with an uninterrupted school experience. To support this initiative, schools will need a supply of antigen-based tests from NYS and the authority to administer these tests to asymptomatic students and staff. A state-level option will ensure effective implementation and equity in schools across NYS.

We realize that there is a debate about whether to mandate vaccinations for all students in grades K-12 and that some parents are reluctant based on the newness of the Covid-19 vaccine for younger children. We firmly believe the approach outlined in this letter provides a path forward that encourages vaccination and allows parents to influence a return to normalcy for their children.

Thank you for your consideration of our proposal. We are available at any time to meet with you, members of your staff or members of the New York State Department of Health to assist in any way possible.

Sincerely,

Eric Byrne, Ed.D
President Lower Hudson Council of School Superintendents

Cc: Dr. Betty A. Rosa, Commissioner of Education
Senator Shelley B. Mayer, Chair of Committee on Education
Westchester County Executive George Latimer
Dutchess County Executive Marcus J. Molinaro
Putnam County Executive MaryEllen Odell
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Dan Fuller, Office of the Governor

