

# Miller Place Union Free School District

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## Via fax (518) 474-1513

May 28, 2021

Re: Universal Mask Wearing for K-12 School Students

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo  
Governor of New York State  
NYS State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo,

Over the past 16 months, students, teachers, and families have faced unprecedented challenges unlike any ever faced in public education. Through it all, the people who comprise school districts all over New York have endured, making the best of difficult situations and continuing to learn, grow and thrive. With COVID-19 cases the lowest they have been since last March 2020, transmission rates within schools remaining low and loosening restrictions in every other aspect of society—including summer day camps—the time has come to end universal mask wearing in schools. Please allow schools to provide extended mask breaks during the school day, both responsibly when indoors seated at their desks and when playing outdoors. Please stop making schools the only exception to mask relief.

As temperatures increase, the time to act is now. Students are in classrooms that are not air conditioned, but, while students remain at their desks six feet apart, they still are required to be masked. This is not an optimal learning environment for students and should not continue. We respectfully ask the state to revise mask requirements to give parents the choice regarding their child's mask wearing protocols. In addition, the steady decline in infections and the low rate of transmission show that it is safe and reasonable to remove masks outdoors and at desks while still being in accordance with changing state health guidelines. It has worked for every other area of society. Why continue to make schools the exception?

The state decision making process during this pandemic has continuously been backed by data and science. That now needs to be coupled with common sense. Every step of the way, our district and countless others throughout the state, have carefully followed all protocols and safety guidelines set forth by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the New York State Department of Health. We see no reason to stop doing that now as the CDC has made it clear that mask usage is no longer required while outdoors, people who are vaccinated and for children who are more than six feet apart. We have made every accommodation to maintain social distancing in our schools. Elementary desks are six feet apart and student interactions are closely monitored. Since September 2020, schools have been asked to adapt to the changing landscape and

guidance set forth by health officials. The guidance has changed, but schools have been handcuffed from adapting and easing the burden on our students.

Approximately 27 states no longer require universal mask wearing for students within the classroom setting. With the increase in warmer weather, coupled with not giving parent's choices regarding students wearing masks, they have begun to keep their children home due to mounting health and safety concerns. This is in direct contradiction to our mutual goal of keeping students in-school, full-time. In addition, student discipline and defiance is expected to increase for special and general education students, which may result in necessary disciplinary action.

The science shows that the spread of COVID has decreased dramatically, especially since more than half of adults in New York are now considered fully vaccinated. The time to act is now to modify universal student mask wearing in their educational environments and allow parents to retain choices pertaining to the health and safety of their children.

Thank you.

*Dr. Marianne F. Cartisano*

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Superintendent of Schools

*Johanna Testa*

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President, Board of Education

*Richard Panico*

Richard Panico  
Vice President, Board of Education

*Keith Frank*

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Trustee, Board of Education

*Lisa Reitan*

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Trustee, Board of Education