

January 29, 2022

Dear Manhasset School Community,

I did not want this turbulent week to end without reaching out to each of you to provide an update on the events of the last five days. As you know, this was a difficult week for our school community as we responded to the Nassau County Supreme Court ruling on the NYS mask mandate. The events that occurred at our Secondary School campus because of this decision garnered local and national media attention.

Yesterday, we notified the sixth precinct that members of our clerical staff have been subjected to several profanity laced calls filled with unspeakable name calling, including from individuals who reside outside the Manhasset community. In addition, because of hurtful and disparaging remarks directed at our District, also from individuals who reside outside our community, we have temporarily removed the District's Twitter account. These are sad reminders of the emotionally charged environment in which we are currently living.

With respect to the mask mandate, the Commissioner of Education notified school districts yesterday that, although the Appellate Division set a hearing deadline for Friday on the issue of the stay application, this deadline pertained only to written submissions. The State Education Department (SED) anticipates that the court will issue a further ruling on the stay application in the coming weeks. SED went on to say, "Until such time, the mask rule remains in effect."

I once again ask for your continued patience as this issue works its way through the courts. We recognize that opinions on the mask mandate differ and remind the community that at this moment in time, the District does not have the legal authority to make a local decision to remove the mask mandate. As of this writing, we do not know if the mask mandate will be struck down, upheld, renewed, or simply expire. Whatever the outcome, the District will remain consistent with its legal requirements and conform its practices within the law.

As we stop to reflect and process this week's events, I hope that we as a school community do not lose sight of all that is good and all that we love about Manhasset and our schools. We all know Manhasset to be a special and wonderful place to raise children. Our schools are remarkable places where our students are loved and cared for by an extraordinarily dedicated faculty and staff. Our community is better because of the strength of our school district.

Recent events aside, it is my hope that we return to the type of discourse that promotes connection. The strength of our school district is dependent in part on our ability to engage in conversations civilly and our ability to handle disagreements respectfully. It is my sincere hope that this weekend gives us all the opportunity to exhale and reflect on and connect to all that is good about this place we call home.

Warmly,

Dr. Gaurav Passi  
Acting Superintendent of Schools