



Erie-Niagara School Superintendents Association

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November 27, 2021

The Honorable Kathleen Hochul
Governor of New York
New York State Capitol Building
Albany, New York 12224

Dear Governor Hochul,

We write to you today to ask that you require the New York State Department of Health to:

1. Help us keep healthy children in school by providing technical, financial and other necessary support to county health departments and school districts to facilitate the state-wide implementation of the "Test to Stay" strategy.
2. Replace open-ended COVID-19 related mandates and restrictions with data- and science-based metrics for implementation and de-implementation of mitigation strategies.

Since the very start of the 2021-2022 school year Western New York, parents, children, school staff and school leaders have been grappling with the challenges associated with the quarantine of unvaccinated students and staff when they are close contacts to a positive COVID-19 case. Every single day, thousands of students across the state who are healthy and well are required by the New York State Department of Health to stay home from school because of its current policy on close contacts and quarantines.

We believe that a state-wide implementation of Test To Stay is necessary, because:

- Serial testing of close contacts has been proven successful in keeping healthy children in school in states across the country
- We need to keep children who are healthy in school instead of unnecessarily excluding them from school
- state-wide guidance is necessary to ensure coherence and equity

To date, the New York State Department of Health has addressed Test To Stay in school districts by saying, "At this time, the NYSDOH does not recommend TTS", and "NYSDOH will not provide new TTS technical assistance or resources for schools located in jurisdictions who permit the practice." The result is that county health departments and school districts are left on their own to try to figure out how to design their own Test To Stay program so that we can prevent thousands of children from missing school despite the fact that they are healthy and well.

More broadly, the New York State Department of Health must clearly outline for school districts and school communities a data-based approach that will result in developing off-ramp language for all COVID-related restrictions and requirements associated with school attendance. The time for open ended and bluntly implemented mandates and restrictions for schools has long since passed.

Specific and science-based metrics are important so everyone knows:

- which mitigations are in effect
- what data points triggered the onset of the mitigation
- the goal of the mitigation
- the data-based plan for de-implementation of a particular mitigations

We appreciate your leadership at a very difficult time. We are especially grateful for your willingness to engage with school leaders in dialogue around the challenges that we face. In fact, it has been decades since we've had a governor who has engaged us as you have. We hope this letter creates the opportunity for further conversation about the challenges we face together.

Happy Thanksgiving to you and your family.

Sincerely,



Michael R. Cornell
E-NSSA President



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