

Dr. Dwight Bonk • Superintendent of Schools
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February 2, 2022

Dear Governor Hochul,

As I reflect on the events of the past week regarding the mask mandate for schools throughout the State of New York, I feel compelled, in my role as Superintendent of Schools of one of the largest school districts in New York State, to personally send this correspondence to ask that the state begin to permit local county health departments to make determinations based on the impact of the Omicron variant within their specific communities. I wrote a similar correspondence last June regarding allowing counties the ability to make such informed decisions based on county data, to former Governor Cuomo. Clearly, we are all remain concerned about the health, welfare, and safety of our staff and students, and since the positivity rates of COVID have decreased significantly within our county over the past 10 days, I suggest that once again, local Departments of Health be provided with additional opportunities to recommend such protocols for school districts.

An example of a very successful initiative that was approved by Dutchess County is the Test-to-Stay Program. Based on the approval of the County, The Wappingers Central School District, which is the largest school district in Dutchess County, implemented the program based upon the approval from the County in early November of last year. The Test-to-Stay Program has allowed our schools to remain open safely without interruption, despite the challenges faced by the Omicron variant. This program should serve as an example of the success that can be achieved safely for all, regionally, when Government and education work collaboratively.

As of this writing, The School Districts have yet to be provided with any metrics from the New York State Department of Health that indicate the process to be utilized to determine when the mask mandate may be lifted. The lack of information regarding these circumstances has been most problematic and has created tremendous discourse within our school community. As an educator, I would prefer to focus the majority of my time and efforts moving forward on teaching and learning, and assisting our families by providing the necessary academic, social, and emotional supports that are much needed at this time and in the future. Thank you for your time and consideration regarding this request.

Respectfully,

Dr. Dwight Bonk
Superintendent of Schools

cc: Dr. Mary Bassett, New York State Department of Health Commissioner
Ms. Sue Serino, State Senator
Ms. Didi Barrett, State Assembly
Mr. Kieran Lalor, State Assembly
Mr. Marcus Molinaro, Dutchess County Executive
Dr. Livia Santiago-Rosado, Dutchess County Department of Health Commissioner
Wappingers Central School District Board of Education