



Akron Central School District

In Pursuit of Excellence

Patrick D. McCabe
Superintendent of Schools

February 10, 2022

Dear Akron CSD Community:

As you know, yesterday Governor Hochul announced that she will not be lifting the universal mask mandate in schools that was set to expire on February 21st. This decision was not the news that I had hoped for and was in stark contrast to the standpoint of area superintendents expressed in a letter sent to the governor and made public on February 1, 2022 (see attached).

Since March of 2020, our entire school community has pulled together in support of our students despite the myriad of challenges that we have faced. School-aged children have experienced the mildest health-related symptoms associated with COVID-19, yet they have endured the greatest restrictions and disruptions to their everyday lives including their educational program.

Given the declining infection rates, low school-based transmission, the ability to monitor potential spread through Test to Stay, availability of vaccinations and boosters, and advancements in treatment, we believe the time has come to transition to a new phase of school operations that does not include mandatory masking for all students and staff.

We all want schools to be safe. We know that they are safe and there are proven ways to keep them safe without causing further disruptions to the educational environment and a child's learning experience.

I, along with other superintendents in our region, issued a statement yesterday (see attached) in response to Governor Hochul's recent press conference, so that our communities are reminded of the previously stated Erie Niagara School Superintendents Association's position. Our hope is that Governor Hochul has identified March 4th as the date to reveal the decision on masking mandates in schools to coincide with the timeline established by governors in neighboring states that have already determined an end date to masking requirements.

I know that this has been a long and challenging period for us all. I do believe that there is a light at the end of the tunnel and remain hopeful that the news we receive at the end of the next 10 days of school provides us with the opportunity to return to a more familiar and normal learning environment. I thank you in advance for your patience as we wait for Governor Hochul's re-evaluation.

On behalf of the Board of Education, your administrators, teachers, and support staff, I express my deepest gratitude for your continued support and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Patrick D. McCabe



Erie-Niagara School Superintendents Association

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February 1, 2022

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

Dear Governor Hochul,

Since September of 2020, students, staff and families have faithfully followed and implemented a constantly changing mosaic of COVID-19 mitigation strategies designed to ensure that schools are safe places for learning and work. Due to these efforts, schools have been the safest place for a child, and for our school employees, regardless of the rate of community transmission or the variant that circulates.

This past fall, our organization added our voices to others around the state and wrote to you to ask that you direct the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) to officially and functionally support Test To Stay. We also asked you to close the chapter on open ended COVID-19 related mandates and restrictions established by NYSDOH.

Since that time, Test To Stay was given full NYSDOH support in late November, and was introduced in Erie and Niagara Counties in January. TTS has helped us keep healthy students in school rather than subjecting them to quarantine, which is critical to the academic progress and social-emotional health of our young people. Also, the currently enforced universal masking order for schools has a scheduled end date of February 21, 2022. Providing advance notice of this critical off-ramp will give students, their families, and our staff time to prepare to for a post-crisis period of time when we have the opportunity to exercise discretion about mask use in schools on our own behalf.

While school aged populations have experienced the mildest health-related symptoms associated with COVID-19, they have also suffered the most under the weight of COVID-related restrictions and requirements. Your recognition of the need to move schools from the emergency phase of COVID-19 to a time when the presence of the virus no longer completely disrupts the school experience is both refreshing and essential.

Sincerely,

Michael R. Cornell

E-NSSA President

Dr. Brian Graham

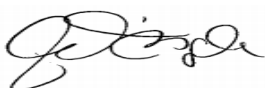
First Vice-President

Jon MacSwan

Second Vice-President



Dr. Jeffrey Rabey, Depew UFSD



Joseph D'Angelo, Maryvale UFSD



Anthony J. Panella, Amherst CSD



Dr. Sean Croft, Starpoint CSD



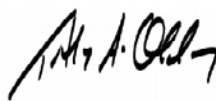
Adam Stoltman, Alden CSD



Dr. Robert Anderson, Gowanda CSD



Dr. Darren Brown-Hall, Williamsville CSD



Dr. Timothy Oldenburg, Tonawanda



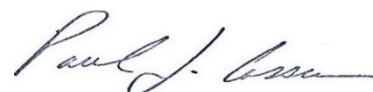
Douglas Scofield, Iroquois CSD



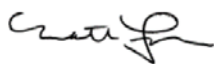
Dr. Michael Vallely, Lancaster CSD



Michael Ginestre, Sweet Home CSD



Paul Casseri, Lewiston-Porter CSD



Matt Frahm, Ed.D, Clarence CSD



Mark Laurrie, Niagara Falls



Timothy P. Carter, Wilson CSD



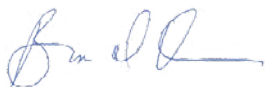
Jeff Sortisio, Eden CSD



Gregory Woytila, North Tonawanda



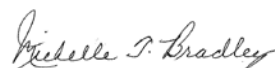
Michael Baumann, Newfane CSD



Brian Russ, East Aurora UFSD



Sabatino Cimato, Ken-Ton



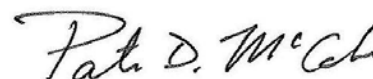
Michelle Bradley, Lockport City



James Bialasik, Springville-GI



Scott Taylor, North Collins CSD



Patrick McCabe, Akron CSD



Dr. Hank Stopinski, Roy-Hart CSD



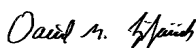
Steven Wright, Cheektowaga Central



Jacob Reimer, Barker CSD



Christopher Swiatek, Frontier CSD



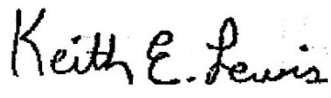
Daniel Ljiljanich, Niagara Wheatfield



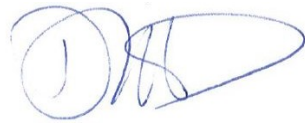
Andrea Galenski, Cheektowaga-Sloan



Matthew Bystrak, West Seneca CSD



Keith Lewis, Lackawanna City



David Lilleck, Orchard Park CSD



Eric Lawton, Holland CSD



Daniel Pacos, Lake Shore CSD



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STATEMENT ON GOVERNOR HOCHUL'S ANNOUNCEMENT REGARDING MASKS IN SCHOOLS

February 9, 2022 – Today, Governor Hochul announced that she does not intend to allow the universal mask mandate in schools to expire on February 21st. The Erie Niagara School Superintendents Association has advocated for the expiration of the mask mandate on that date.

Over the course of the last two years of this pandemic, school superintendents, in collaboration with our Boards of Education, have done everything we can to hold our school communities together in the face of a disease that disrupted daily life in nearly every possible way, and have done so in spite of federal, state and local policies that have sometimes resulted in confusion and frustration. We appreciate everyone's patience and understanding as we support each other through this difficult period without causing further strain in the relationships between communities and their schools.

School aged populations have experienced the mildest health-related symptoms associated with COVID-19, yet they have also suffered the most under the weight of COVID-related restrictions and requirements. It is time to move schools from the emergency phase of COVID-19 to a new phase when the presence of a virus no longer disrupts the normal operations of our schools.

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