



**Comsewogue School District
Miller Place Union Free School District
Mount Sinai School District
Port Jefferson School District
Rocky Point Union Free School District**

Sent via fax (518) 474-1513 and US Postal Service (CM:RR)

November 10, 2021

Governor Kathy Hochul
Governor of the State of New York
NYS Capitol Building
Albany, NY 11224

Re: Universal Mask Wearing in Public K-12 Education

Dear Governor Hochul:

You have long championed public school districts, and since becoming our governor, have provided guidance as we navigate extraordinary times. Your leadership has helped us achieve two of our primary goals this school year: keeping our school community safe and keeping schools open for full-time in-person education.

Our districts have followed your reopening guidelines—specifically mask mandates and contact tracing protocols—to the letter. As the weather begins to get colder and holding class activities outdoors becomes more difficult, we ask that you help clarify what metrics the New York State Department of Health will use to determine whether the mask mandate will remain in effect and for what duration.

When you first announced the mask mandate for all students and school personnel when indoors, you specifically mentioned that it would be reassessed quarterly. However, to date, we have not heard back as to what that assessment will entail and what guidelines might be revised. What data is going to be looked at to determine if any change in the mask mandate will be made? If mask mandates are reduced, it is imperative that quarantine rules be adjusted accordingly. Furthermore, will consideration be given to circumstances where individuals are greater than 6 feet apart, alone in a classroom or office, or when cleaning a building at night with no students present?

It's no secret that mask usage is a point of contention in our communities, as it is throughout the country. We want to be able to provide our families, students and employees as much information as possible so that there is a better understanding of the mandate's rationale and progress. Right now, we are left without answers to questions we are getting daily from our communities. Please aid us in supporting the communities we serve by shedding some light on the process the state is following.

Another question on which we need clarification pertains to whether masks will be required for indoor winter sports, such as basketball, wrestling, and winter track. Guidelines for mask usage during the 2020-2021 school year stated that masks were required to be worn while actively competing “as tolerable.” This year, the key qualifier “as tolerable” is no longer in the mandate’s language. Will the language be modified before the season begins? If not, student safety could be seriously compromised. For example, modifications have had to be made to allow gymnasts to remove their masks so that masks do not interfere with their vision while performing.

To be clear, we need answers to these questions so that we can put systems and accommodations in place to carry them out. As of now, we do not have the direction needed to do so while also keeping student-athletes safe.

We look forward to your feedback and welcome a more in-depth discussion so that we can further advocate for our communities.

In closing, please note, this letter was written with the support of our Boards of Education. We look forward to working cooperatively with you in the coming months to ensure that our staff and students remain safe until this pandemic is controlled and/or behind us.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jennifer Quinn

Comsewogue School District

Dr. Jennifer Quinn, Superintendent of Schools

Dr. Marianne F. Cartisano

Miller Place Union Free School District

Dr. Marianne F. Cartisano, Superintendent of Schools

Mr. Gordon Brosdal

Mount Sinai School District

Mr. Gordon Brosdal, Superintendent of Schools

Ms. Jessica Schmettan

Port Jefferson School District

Ms. Jessica Schmettan, Superintendent of Schools

Dr. Scott O’Brien

Rocky Point Union Free School District

Dr. Scott O’Brien, Superintendent of Schools

Copy to:

Dr. Mary T. Bassett, Commissioner, New York State Department of Health (sent via fax and US Postal Service - CM:RR)

Mr. Steve Bellone, Suffolk County Executive (sent via email and US Postal Service - CM:RR)

Dr. Gregson H. Pigott, Commissioner, Suffolk County Department of Health (sent via email and US Postal Service – CM:RR)

Dr. Rochelle Walensky, Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (sent via email and US Postal Service – CM:RR)

Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, Director, NIAID Office of Communications and Government Relation (sent via email and US Postal Service – CM:RR)