



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

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**Via Fax:** (518) 474-1513 (Governor's Office) and (518) 474-6608 (NYSDOH)

May 28, 2021

Re: Local Control Needed by Board of Education

Dear Governor Cuomo and Dr. Howard Zucker,

In August, public school districts were asked to put together safe and effective reopening strategies that met the needs and comfort levels of the individual communities they serve. Those reopening guidelines have been followed to the letter for more than 9 months. Since that time, guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the New York State Department of Health have loosened as transmission rates declined and vaccination rates increased. However, somehow, restrictions on schools have remained stagnant. As we have seen time and time again throughout the pandemic, stopping the spread needs to be handled locally; there is no one blanket solution. That is why we ask you to enable each individual school district to again work with our local health agencies and make plans that work for the communities we serve and to not force square pegs into round holes. We recognize that these are still unprecedented times, but we cannot allow inertia to be the basis for how decisions are made regarding our students physical and mental health.

Each measure school districts have taken has been made with close consultation from health officials and with input from our communities, and they are working. COVID-19 is not spreading in schools. Positivity rates are low. We represent four Suffolk County school districts and more than 100,000 Long Island residents. What works for New York City does not apply to Long Island the same way that what works for Buffalo does not work for Syracuse. We ask that you give control back to the school districts. Let our boards of education, which have been rightfully elected by our residents to represent them in school district matters, make the decisions that are in line with our communities' desires and best interests.

If summer day camps can operate without mandating that campers wear face coverings, then why are schools not given the same ability to extend mask breaks while students are socially distant or outdoors—many public schools will be operating summer camps in just a few short weeks. Our communities are looking at schools to adapt according to health guidelines, but we are handcuffed by unchanging regulations that only apply to schools.

Approximately 27 states no longer require universal mask wearing for students within the classroom setting. With the increase in warmer weather, coupled with not giving parent's choices regarding students wearing masks, they have begun to keep their children home due to mounting health and safety concerns. This is in direct contradiction to our mutual goal of keeping students in-school, full-time. In addition, student discipline and defiance is expected to increase for special and general education students, which may result in necessary

disciplinary action. With the ability to make decisions locally, schools can work with local health officials and our communities to make responsible, informed, science-based decisions that will keep students safe and maintain a healthy learning environment.

Though we are all from neighboring districts and we are one in our message, we represent four very different communities with four very different perspectives. As public schools, it is our obligation to serve our communities. However, the way these restrictions are being enforced, our communities and our students are the ones who bear the brunt of the burden. With the support and guidance from our local health officials who are analyzing the communities where our families reside, please give public school districts back the power to operate according to the needs of the communities we serve.

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

*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