

March 24, 2021

Howard Zucker MD, JD
Commissioner, New York Department of Health
Corning Tower
Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY 12237

Dear Dr. Zucker,

On behalf of superintendents in the Questar III BOCES region, we want to thank you for your leadership throughout the pandemic and working to help us reopen our schools. Our school districts have followed the state's guidance, purchased additional items, collaborated with the BOCES and county departments of health on best practices, and worked to educate our community on the importance of personal responsibility to ensure our schools are safe for all.

Today, we are asking the State Health Department and State Education Department respectfully for your assistance in updating guidance that was initially created in mid-July 2020 that considers:

- the experiences and lessons learned of the past year
- the current downward trend of test positivity within our counties
- the updated guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

We want to return more students to full-time, in-person learning, but the current regulations and guidance preclude us from doing so. This is an opportune time to learn from the past and reimagine the future for in-person learning for the end of school year and later this fall. Schools have demonstrated what can be accomplished through cooperation and collaboration.

Specifically, we are asking the state to adopt the CDC guidance that would allow 3 feet of physical distancing. Our districts pledge to the following to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 within our buildings:

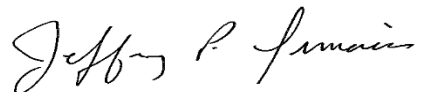
- Remind stakeholders of the importance of personal responsibility – a key element of our reopening plans last summer.
- Maintain physical distance at three feet, with masks.
- Continue to emphasize and enforce the wearing of masks
- Continue to clean and disinfect our facilities.
- Continue to provide appropriate PPE for all students and staff.
- Engage stakeholders in the plan to return students to in-person learning, consistent with our efforts last summer and throughout this school year.

While the state has allowed our local health departments to have some discretion with COVID-19, we urge more uniformity in decision-making where possible and applicable.

Within our BOCES region, about a third of our districts are based in multiple counties, which makes it difficult to respond when counties adopt different strategies or tactics.

As more schools across the country prepare to reopen, we are seeking your direction and clarity so we can determine the next steps for our students and communities. Please contact any one of us with any questions or concerns regarding our request. We would be happy to brief you on our experience and success in keeping our schools open since September.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Simons
Superintendent
East Greenbush CSD
Chair of the Superintendents' Subcommittee,
Advocacy and Business and School Partnerships
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Dr. Gladys I. Cruz
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Questar III BOCES
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The other 21 Superintendents of the Questar III BOCES Region

Dr. James Franchini, Averill Park CSD
Aditya Joseph Dhara, Berlin CSD
Dr. Angelina Maloney, Brunswick CSD
Michael Wetherbee, Cairo-Durham CSD
Dr. Ronel Cook, Catskill CSD
Dr. Salvatore DeAngelo, Chatham CSD
Randall Squier, Coxsackie-Athens CSD
Benjamin Bragg, Germantown CSD
Tammy Sutherland, Greenville CSD
G. Michael Apostol, Hoosic Valley CSD
Patrick Dailey, Hoosick Falls CSD

Dr. Maria Suttmeier, Hudson CSD
Suzanne Guntlow, Ichabod Crane CSD
Dr. Antonio Abitabile, Lansingburgh CSD
Andrew Kourt, New Lebanon CSD
Christine Hamill, North Greenbush CSD
Joseph Kardash, Rensselaer CSD
Jason Chevrier, Schodack CSD
Dr. Neil Howard Jr., Taconic Hills
John Carmello, Troy CSD
Dr. Mary Yodis, Wynantskill UFSD

cc: Dr. Betty A. Rosa, New York State Commissioner of Education
Jack Mabb, Columbia County Director of Health
Mary Fran Wachunas, Rensselaer County Public Health Director
Penny Martinez, Health Educator, Greene County Public Health
Assemblymember Jake Ashby
Assemblymember Didi Barrett
Senator Neil Breslin
Senator Daphne Jordan
Assemblymember John McDonald
Assemblymember Chris Tague