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STATEMENT FROM NYSACHO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARAH RAVENHALL CONCERNING COVID-19 PREVENTION AND RESPONSE ACTIVITIES IN SCHOOLS

Many people have expressed support for reducing social distancing and other COVID-19 prevention and response measures in schools across the state. As these options are weighed, there are several key points that must be carefully considered in order to make sound decisions to keep students, faculty and staff safe and prevent localized resurgences of COVID-19 that can threaten entire communities.

These points include the following:

- COVID-19 has not gone away. It is still a serious risk, and it is still infecting and killing New Yorkers every day.
- Social distancing, masking and quarantine activities are proven effective measures to prevent and reduce the spread of COVID-19.
- Every school district in New York State is required by the State to develop and implement their own unique COVID-19 reopening plan.
- State Department of Health COVID-19 guidance related to school reopening plans supersede all others, including all CDC and local recommendations.
- Local/County health departments are required by the State to follow the State's guidance regarding schools and isolation of COVID-19 cases and quarantine of close contacts.
- NYSDOH close contact definition of being within 6 feet of a person infected with COVID-19 for 10 minutes or more while they were infectious has not changed as a result of reducing distance between students in classrooms.
- Per State DOH guidance, local/county health departments are not required to approve school reopening plans; their role is to assist schools in their decision-making and, if cases of COVID occur in the school setting, enforce disease control measures such as isolation and quarantine.
- Local/County health officials are working closely with school leaders and stakeholders to help them make evidence-based public health recommendations.
- To protect our children and families, it remains essential to act with an abundance of caution to prevent localized outbreaks, especially in counties where there is a very high infection rate.
- Reason must prevail if we are to protect ourselves, our families and our communities. As public servants, County Health Officials have put their lives on the line during the pandemic to protect the health of our community members so we must do all we can to support and protect that intent.
- We all have a personal responsibility for public health outcomes in our communities, and we remain in the midst of a deadly pandemic. Keep masking, social distancing, following gathering restrictions and, if recommended by your healthcare provider, get tested and most importantly, get vaccinated! Only our actions will bring an end to this pandemic.

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