

July 9, 2021

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

Dear Dr. Zucker:

We ask for your support in providing updated state guidance that would allow schools to fully reopen for all students in September. On behalf of the 22 superintendents in the Questar III BOCES region, we recommend the following based on the experiences and lessons learned of the past year, the current downward trend of test positivity, the [most recent guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control](#), and the consensus of our school superintendents in our tri-county region:

- Bus Travel
 - Allow school buses to return to normal, pre-COVID-19 capacities. We cannot return all students to school based on last year's bus guidance.
- Daily Items
 - Continue daily screening for students and staff.
 - Do not mandate daily reporting to the COVID-19 Report Card Dashboard.
- Safety Protocols
 - Adopt the CDC guidance that would allow 3 feet of physical distancing between students within school buildings. It is impossible to return all students to school without reducing distancing within our classrooms and cafeterias. Continue the 6-foot social distancing guidance whenever possible.
 - Continue other safety protocols as currently implemented (i.e., cleaning, etc.).
 - Avoid "choose your own guidance" that puts districts in a difficult position with families, students, staff, and others. Consistency is important across our districts and school communities. While the state has allowed local health departments to have some discretion with COVID-19, we urge more uniformity in decision-making where possible and applicable. Within our region, about a third of our districts are based in multiple counties, which makes it difficult to respond if counties adopt different strategies.
- Outside on School Property
 - Continue guidance that masks are not required to be worn outside on school property by either vaccinated or unvaccinated students and staff.
- Inside School Buildings
 - Require masks to be worn by vaccinated and unvaccinated staff and students whenever moving inside of buildings.
 - Allow vaccinated and unvaccinated staff and students to remove masks once seated in the classroom, within a group setting or cohort.
 - Allow vaccinated staff not in direct contact with students to choose whether to wear a mask inside the building.

Our efforts last year – in accordance with state guidance and coordination with our county health officials – allowed many, but not all, of our students to return to in-person learning. We respectfully request that updated guidance for the 2021-22 school year be issued as soon as possible to allow leaders to effectively plan in partnership with local county health officials. In addition, the release of updated guidance from the NYS DOH will allow the NYSED to release their guidance consistent with your guidance. Our schools have demonstrated throughout the pandemic what is possible by working together.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. Please contact me if you would like to discuss these recommendations in further detail.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Gladys I. Cruz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Dr. Gladys I. Cruz
District Superintendent
Questar III BOCES

cc: Dr. Betty A. Rosa, Commissioner, New York State Education Department
Lester W. Young, Jr., Chancellor, New York State Board of Regents
Josephine Victoria Finn, Vice Chancellor, New York State Board of Regents
James Baldwin, Senior Deputy Commissioner for Education Policy, New York State Education Department
Assemblymember Jake Ashby
Assemblymember Didi Barrett
Senator Neil Breslin
Senator Michelle Hinchey
Senator Daphne Jordan
Assemblymember John McDonald
Assemblymember Chris Tague
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
Jeffrey Simons, East Greenbush 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
Sally Shields, 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
Jack Mabb, Columbia County Director of Health
Mary Fran Wachunas, Rensselaer County Public Health Director
Kimberly Kaplan, Greene County Director of Public Health