



February 7, 2022

Dr. Mary T. Bassett
Commissioner
New York State Department of Health
Corning Tower, Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY 12237

Dear Dr. Bassett,

In December, I wrote you asking the state to reopen its COVID testing sites in anticipation of the holiday surge and spread of the more contagious Omicron variant. Thank you for providing additional state resources to help expediate testing locally and across the state.

Today, I am writing on behalf of our region's superintendents, students, and families asking for your leadership and partnership in charting a path forward for our districts. Since March 2020, our students, staff, and families have admirably navigated changing conditions and state guidance on a weekly, if not daily, basis.

While it is difficult to make predictions during a public health emergency, it is easy to see the stress and anxiety many are feeling due to the pandemic and changing conditions. Most recently, we saw the stress and confusion associated with the Nassau Supreme Court ruling and subsequent stay that keeps the mask mandate through early March.

On behalf of our region's superintendents, I am recommending the following steps to help transition the focus of our schools away from COVID distractions and restrictions and back to our core mission of educating students:

- **Work with and communicate with superintendents prior to the release of any new guidance changes to the public.** This will enable our leaders to effectively review and plan for changes in partnership with county health departments – and then communicate those changes to the public. We also ask the state to identify the changes in guidance by highlighting the updates or changes in its memos or charts.
- **Create and monitor benchmarks to make this more manageable and understandable.** For example, what is the guidance for school mask requirements and when and how might these evolve based on transmission levels or vaccination rates? These metrics should show what will happen if conditions improve or worsen.
- **Continue to provide a steady supply of at home test kits and those associated with surveillance testing.** The availability of test kits is a welcome change. It is a mitigation strategy that is helping us to keep positive cases out of our buildings.
- **Provide statewide consistency.** We ask for consistency across the state, especially when we have school districts and BOCES involving multiple counties and health departments that may have differing approaches.

As you know, the last two years have been difficult for our children, families, and staff. I am proud of how they have responded and their continued flexibility, adaptability, and patience. On behalf of our region's superintendents, I am asking for the state to work with us to help chart this path forward so that we can sustain our schools and the public's trust and investment in public education.

GLADYS I. CRUZ, DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT

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Thank you for your continued work and we look forward to your collaboration in the weeks and months ahead. Please feel free to contact me via phone at (518) 479-6993 or via email at gcruz@questar.org if you would like to discuss these recommendations in further detail.

Sincerely,



Gladys I. Cruz, Ph.D.
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
Dr. James N. Baldwin, Senior Deputy Commissioner, 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. Lisamarie Spindler, 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
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