



Huntington Union Free School District

James W. Polansky | Superintendent of Schools

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SENT VIA CERTIFIED MAIL & ELECTRONIC FORM

The Honorable Kathleen Hochul
Governor of New York State
Executive Chamber, State Capitol
Albany, New York 12224

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

Dear Governor Hochul & Dr. Bassett:

This letter is in follow-up to a [prior communication sent on November 10, 2021](#), which I have enclosed for your ease of reference. We are now approaching two years since the pandemic declaration. The situation has been challenging for all, as it was and remains uncharted territory to a large degree. Nonetheless, as a society, inclusive of medical professionals, government officials, educators and parents, we clearly know more now than we did in March of 2020. From an educational perspective, this knowledge recently allowed us to work diligently in keeping our schools open during the post-winter recess spike caused by the Omicron variant. This was extraordinarily important in terms of maintaining a sense of consistency and continuity for our children.

In this light and acknowledging that there are novel aspects of the virus that may continue to surface routinely, there is consensus that we are collectively at a stage where we are pursuing courses of action that allow us to live within the general presence of COVID-19 as opposed to letting it control us. Since last summer, as educational leaders were crafting their 2021-2022 opening plans, we have asked for metric-related guidance suggesting when specific mitigation measures (e.g., masking, distancing) can be relaxed or removed. (Again, please refer to my November letter.) In sum and substance, there has been no action in this regard. The answer to such questions is routinely in the general format, “now is not the time.”

So I ask the question, “when is the time?” The state owes it to schools and families to establish these “off-ramps” and set reasonable expectations for return to a greater sense of normalcy. The inexplicable aversion toward engaging in meaningful discussions about such metrics has made the situation infinitely more challenging for everyone. Continuous mandate extensions, while generating no true understanding of the conditions under which they will conclude, are simply increasing confusion, frustration and tension.

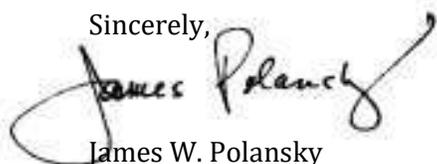
The State could have prevented or alleviated circumstances that have set up many school districts as battlegrounds. Educational leaders should not be placed in a position to serve as infectious disease experts. They should not be placed in any situation, caused by elements beyond their control, that leads to divisiveness within a community. Unfortunately, this is precisely what has occurred. The fact that we currently await a decision from the Appellate Division on masking in schools is clear evidence. Opinions clearly vary at present, but the common element is that we all wish to further the return to “normal,” particularly for our children who are unfortunately bearing the brunt in numerous regards.

This is an impassioned plea for your help in allowing us to move forward productively. Engage in the conversations that will ultimately permit me to share information with my community on where we are headed and, most importantly, when. We remain hopeful that the current downward trend in COVID positivity continues. With that said, at what points/thresholds can we begin to peel back the layers of our mitigation strategies?

Our children have suffered. Our communities have suffered. I recognize the challenges you face as State leaders, but I implore you to consider actions and information that are likely to make a positive difference for our students, families and schools.

Thank you in advance for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Polansky". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

James W. Polansky
Superintendent of Schools

Enclosure

cc: Board of Education
Senator James Gaughran
Assemblyman Steven Stern