



THE ASSEMBLY
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

November 16, 2021

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Executive Chamber
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul:

As Covid-19 vaccines have now been approved for all school-age children, we believe it is time to consider setting a threshold for when masks will no longer be required indoors at schools for fully vaccinated students. We believe that having a threshold in place will incentivize vaccination, provide clarity to school districts, and help our children and communities.

We appreciate that masks have allowed our children to return to in-person school, which has brought them and their families a much-needed return towards normalcy. However, masks can have a negative impact on learning which must also be considered. According to a joint study from York University and Ben Gurion University, masks disrupt face recognition in school-age children which "could have significant effects on children's social interactions with their peers and their ability to form important relationships with educators"¹ Masks also muffle speech, making it harder to hear and understand the speaker.² As we approach the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is time to weigh the negative impact on learning against the diminished risk of virus transmission and serious illness among vaccinated students and staff.

Parents and coaches have expressed concern that student-athletes will be required to wear masks for the upcoming indoor winter sports season. Given that many school districts have required vaccination in order to play high-risk sports, and the challenges of wearing a mask while competing, a State threshold to end the indoor school mask mandate for vaccinated students would greatly benefit student-athletes.

Our neighboring state of Massachusetts has a threshold in place which allows local school districts to request State approval to lift the mask mandate for vaccinated students when a school reaches an 80% vaccination rate. As of November 3rd, eleven schools in the state have

¹ <https://psyarxiv.com/fygjq/>

² <https://asa.scitation.org/doi/10.1121/10.0002279>

received such approval.³ New York State should follow this example and, in consultation with local health departments, establish a similar threshold for lifting the indoor mask requirement for vaccinated students in schools based on factors such as vaccination rate or community spread. This will encourage parents to vaccinate their children and improve the school learning experience.

Vaccination is our path back to normalcy. State guidance setting a threshold to remove the indoor school mask mandate for vaccinated students can help get us there.

Thank you,

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Member of Assembly, 88th District

John McDonald III
Member of Assembly, 108th District

Fred Thiele
Member of Assembly, 1st District

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Steve Englebright
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Member of Assembly, 146th District

Cc: Dr. Howard Zucker

³ <https://www.masslive.com/boston/2021/11/these-11-massachusetts-schools-received-state-approval-to-lift-mask-mandate-after-showing-covid-vaccination-rates-of-at-least-80.html>