

ROCKVILLE CENTRE UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT

John O'Shea, President • Christine Ferazani, Vice President • Kelly Barry, Secretary • Tara Hackett, Trustee • Erica Messier, Trustee

Robert A. Bartels, Interim Superintendent of Schools

Janine Sampino, Ed. D., Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum
Veronica Ossi Lalo, Acting Assistant Superintendent of Business & Personnel
Jeanne Love, Executive Director of Special Education & PPS
Sonia Hood, Central Director of Curriculum & Instruction



December 23, 2021

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
New York State Capitol Building
Albany, New York 12224

Dear Governor Hochul:

Thank you for your leadership during this unprecedented time. As we enter 2022, the pandemic continues to affect school districts across New York State. More than ever, our collaborative efforts are needed to ensure that we are able to keep our schools open and accessible while providing a safe learning and work environment.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, the Rockville Centre School District has effectively communicated, executed, and enforced New York State's COVID-19 mandates and protocols. As a result, we have returned all of our students to full-time, in-person instruction with minimal in-school transmission. However, it is important to understand that there have been challenges as a result of these mandates leading to many in our community voicing their frustrations. Consequently, this has taken time and focus away from our purpose; serving the students of our school district.

As we know it is New York State's intention to create a supportive structure for public schools, we are requesting that more be done to facilitate our work educating children with the following:

1. Regarding Assembly Bill A8378 or any potential COVID vaccine mandate, it is critical that the State of New York allow individuals to maintain choice with regard to a COVID-19 vaccination. In listening to our community, we anticipate that the implementation of a vaccination mandate will negatively impact our school district. As we learned from the immunization mandate of 2019, such mandates deeply impact schools as many families opt to leave for independent study programs or other alternatives to classroom-based instruction. Accordingly, a vaccine mandate will jeopardize our ability to continue to provide in-person instruction for all of our students. The effects of a vaccine mandate will further complicate our ability to properly staff our schools.

We have demonstrated our ability to keep COVID-19 transmission at a negligible level within our schools regardless of vaccination status. Our students and staff have already faced two years of uncertainty and change. At this time, we need stability and security. Therefore, we request that no mandate be imposed by New York State for a COVID-19 vaccination as a requirement to attend or work in a public school.

2. New York State guidance must be reflective of the most current recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). On December 1st, 2021, the AAP issued new guidance pertaining to masking in winter sports. According to the AAP, certain exceptions should be made with regards to masking during athletic play due to their inherent safety risks. However, our

student-athletes are still bound to the guidance that was issued in September of 2021 which mandates universal masking during sports with no exception. In addition, on December 17th, 2021 the CDC released two reports highlighting the use of test-to-stay practices to minimize absenteeism and learning loss during traditional quarantine. At present, there has been no update to New York State's quarantine policy for unvaccinated students. As the CDC and AAP make modifications to their guidance, we request that New York State update its mandates in a timely fashion.

In the Rockville Centre School District, we believe in the importance of safe, in-person instruction for our students. To allow us to return to the business of educating our students in the safest and most normal way, our students, teachers, administrators and community need your support. Thank you for your consideration in these matters.

Sincerely,

Rockville Centre Board of Education

Rockville Centre Board of Education

Robert A. Bartels

Robert A. Bartels

Interim Superintendent

cc: New York State Senator Todd Kaminsky
kaminsky@nysenate.gov
New York Assembly Member Judy Griffin
griffinj@nyassembly.gov