

# **Eastport-South Manor Central School District**

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November 23, 2021

Governor Kathleen Hochul  
New York State Capitol Building  
Albany, New York 12224

Dear Honorable Hochul,

We are writing on behalf of the Eastport-South Manor School District, a school community located in eastern Long Island.

With the COVID-19 vaccine now authorized for use in children ages 5-11, there is growing concern in our community and beyond that a mandate will soon be issued requiring all students to receive the vaccine as a condition of attending public school in New York State. We also understand that some elected officials have already begun to discuss this very matter and have drafted potential legal statutes. Knowing this, we cannot sit idly by without addressing this matter head-on, as we feel it is our responsibility to speak out on behalf of those in our community.

As a school district, we adamantly oppose such a mandate for our students and believe the decision to vaccinate a child should be left to their individual family in consultation with their health care provider. A sweeping mandate to inoculate all school-aged children with the COVID-19 vaccine is an overreach of power and will leave polarizing effects across our great state.

Time and time again, it has been demonstrated that schools are not the superspreader grounds for COVID-19 as some had originally feared. With proactive measures in place, we have worked to keep our COVID-19 numbers low while reintroducing many programs and offerings for our students in mixed group settings. All of this begs the question: Why would a universal vaccine mandate be in everyone's best interest now if we are not seeing soaring high numbers and uncontrollable spread? This is especially concerning in that the mere notion of a possible mandate has created a divide in communities, leaving some families feeling powerless when it comes to balancing their child's education with what is in the best interest of their health — which is why this is not a matter that should be left to a universally written law, but rather in the hands of the child's family and health care professionals.

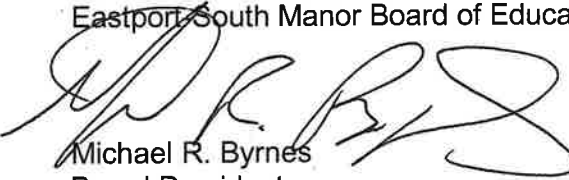
Another monstrous hurdle that our schools are facing is the mandatory quarantine for students deemed close contacts, regardless of whether they exhibit symptoms or not. In many cases, this disruption results in irreversible setbacks in the student's educational process, creating a significant gap in their ability to remain on pace with learning, which is compounded by the universal loss of education from earlier in the pandemic. For this reason, we ask that you consider altering the protocols to allow individuals to test back in from an assigned quarantine if they are able to provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test. By limiting their time away from the classroom, we would be taking a much-needed step forward in helping them recover from the losses suffered during the pandemic and remain in step with their fellow classmates.

*Together We Build Excellence*

We implore you to keep our request in mind and to restore local control over issues such as mask mandates in schools to the district's individual boards of education. Now is the time to act and allow us to proceed with plans best suited for our own communities. Together we can move forward, but not if we are forced to remain divided.

Sincerely,

~~Eastport~~ South Manor Board of Education



Michael R. Byrnes  
Board President

cc: Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie  
Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart Cousins  
Senator Anthony Palumbo  
Senator Alexis Weik  
Congressman Lee Zeldin  
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NYSDOH Commissioner Dr. Bassett  
SCDOH Commissioner Dr. Pigott