NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Area state legislators get behind call from area school superintendents to reopen schools: Point to CDC's revised guidance and call on Cuomo administration to revise NY's distancing mandate to 3 feet

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It is time to fully acknowledge how critical this action is to the educational development and mental health of our students. It is time for all of our students to go back to school.

Elmira, N.Y., March 22—State lawmakers from across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions are getting behind area school superintendents and joining the call for the Cuomo administration to give the go-ahead to allow all schools to return to full-time, in-person classroom instruction.

State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats), Assemblywoman Marjorie Byrnes (R,C-Calendonia), Assemblyman Chris Friend (R,C,I-Big Flats), Assemblyman Joe Giglio (R,C-Olean), and Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning) said today that the only thing standing in the way of that return to in-person learning for all students is a Cuomo executive order requiring a minimum distance of 6 feet between students in classrooms.

In a March 17th letter (see attached copy above), nearly two dozen area school superintendents called on Governor Andrew Cuomo to reduce the state's distance mandate to 3 feet. The superintendents representing the Greater Southern Tier BOCES (GST BOCES) note that while some, mostly smaller districts have been able to fully resume daily, in-person learning, most districts, especially larger ones, cannot do the same for their students and families because of the current executive order requiring the minimum distance of 6 feet.

The superintendents wrote to the governor, in part, "It is our sincere hope that you and the Department of Health will consider a more equitable approach in adjusting the density requirements that are prohibiting full in-person daily learning from occurring. Our students need more connection, instruction, and interaction. Our school communities need to see that there is light at the end of this pandemic tunnel."

[Last Friday, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), acknowledging a growing body of public health data surveying the experience of school systems over the past year of the COVID-19 pandemic, revised its guidelines to permit 3-foot distancing in school classrooms.](#) The new CDC guidelines also include reduced distancing guidelines for performing arts education participants, from 12- to 6-feet apart, a move that the legislators had also called for in a February 19th letter to Cuomo. Adopting this new distancing guideline would allow for more students to participate in the performing arts, they said.

Consequently, lawmakers and superintendents are now calling on Cuomo and the state Department of Health to reissue New York's guidance and protocols that most accurately reflect current COVID-19 conditions and authorize the necessary local flexibility that will allow district administrators and their school communities to accomplish a complete return to the classroom effectively, efficiently, safely, and successfully.

That means reducing the current distancing requirement from 6 feet to 3 feet.

In a letter today to the governor (see attached copy above), O'Mara, Byrnes, Friend, Giglio and Palmesano wrote, "We are calling on your administration to immediately move forward to allow the requested change in state regulations. Until New York State revises this mandate and reduces the distancing requirement – a move now supported by federal health leaders, many physicians and public health experts, as well as scientific studies and data -- students in too many districts will remain shut out from returning to their classrooms full time. It is time to move this priority to the top of the list. It is time to fully acknowledge how critical this action is to the educational development and mental health of our students. It is time for all of our students to go back to school."