



Greater Southern Tier Council of School Superintendents

*Serving the school communities in the Southern Tier of New York State
Steuben, Schuyler, Chemung, Tioga, Alleghany counties*

March 17, 2021

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

The superintendents who represent the component school districts of the Greater Southern Tier BOCES collectively believe that students need to be back in school five days a week. In order to move closer to accomplishing this crucial return to in-person instruction, in a safe and reasonable manner and in accordance with state health and education department guidelines, districts need revised guidance to allow schools flexibility on social distancing requirements. The current mandates regarding six-foot social distancing to de-densify schools and classrooms must be reduced so our children may return to full in-person learning five days a week. Some smaller districts within our BOCES have been able to accomplish in person instruction for all students daily; however, most large school districts are unable to meet current distancing requirements and increase the number of students in our schools and classrooms. The application of this social distancing requirement in the classroom and on the school bus is the primary obstacle preventing most schools from fully opening daily in person learning.

With the recent announcement for state residents to freely travel across the United States and the allowance of play for all high-risk sports, our communities are understandably perplexed about why these high-risk activities are acceptable, yet a return to full-time in-school instruction is not. If students can wrestle, play basketball, football, etc. daily, why can't students attend schools daily with a reduction in the social distancing requirement? If domestic travelers can now freely travel throughout the country without the requirement of quarantining and testing, why can't our students work daily masked and within 3 feet of each other?

Data continue to show students are safely participating in activities that involve spacing less than six feet (*see data references below*). Our transmission rate has significantly decreased since September across our region and state. **Therefore, we are collectively advocating for an immediate update to the social distancing guidance, allowing schools the flexibility to open for in-person learning of up to five days a week until the end of this school year.** This way schools will be ready for a full reopening five days a week in September. Since the onset of COVID-19, we have seen varying sets of guidelines. We are simply asking for updated guidelines from the NYS Department of Health to allow for the full reopening process to occur as soon as possible.

We understand the frustration many parents and students are feeling, and we are committed to working with them towards the goal of fully, yet safely, reopening schools. 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 a light at the end of this pandemic tunnel.

Thank you for considering this much needed guidance update to return our students to full week in-person instruction safely. We look for the calm, steady, and data-supported guidance that will maintain safe school environments.

Joe DioGuardi
Superintendent
Addison CSD

Tracie Bliven
Superintendent
Alfred-Almond CSD

Jesse Harper
Superintendent
Arkport CSD

Stephen C. Saxton
Superintendent
Avoca CSD

Joseph L. Rumsey
Superintendent
Bath CSD

John Marshall
Superintendent
Bradford CSD

Kathleen Hagenbuch
Superintendent
Campbell-Savona CSD

Chad C. Groff
Superintendent
Canaseraga CSD

Thomas J. Crook
Superintendent
Canisteo-Greenwood CSD

Michelle A. Caulfield
Superintendent
Corning-Painted Post ASD

Hillary J. Austin
Superintendent
Elmira CSD

Michael F. Gill
Superintendent
Elmira Heights CSD

Kyle C. Bower
Superintendent
Hammondsport CSD

Jeremy Palotti
Superintendent
Hornell CSD

Dr. Thomas J. Douglas
Superintendent
Horseheads CSD

LeeAnne H. Jordan
Superintendent
Jasper-Troupsburg CSD

Christopher J. Wood
Superintendent
Odessa-Montour CSD

Kory G. Bay
Superintendent
Prattsburgh CSD

Diahann Hesler
Superintendent
Spencer-Van Etten CSD

Gregory K. Kelahan
Superintendent
Watkins Glen CSD

Eric Knolles
Superintendent
Waverly CSD

James R. Frame
District Superintendent
Greater Southern Tier BOCES

c.
New York State Senate Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins
New York State Senate Minority Leader Robert Ort
New York State Senate Thomas O'Mara
Commissioner of Health Dr. Howard A. Zucker
Chemung County Executive Christopher Moss
Chemung County Commissioner of Public Health Peter Buzzetti
Steuben County Manager Jack Wheeler
Steuben County Director of Public Health Darlene Smith

New York State Assembly Leader Carl Heastie
New York State Assembly Minority Leader William Barclay
New York State Assembly Deputy Minority Leader Phil Palmesano
New York State Assembly Christopher Friend
New York State Assembly Marjorie Byrnes

Supporting Data (Articles/Studies):

Effectiveness of three versus six feet of physical distancing for controlling spread of COVID-19 among primary and secondary students and staff: A retrospective, state-wide cohort study

<https://academic.oup.com/cid/advance-article/doi/10.1093/cid/ciab230/6167856>

NY Times: A new study suggests 3 feet, not 6 feet, is sufficient distance for school students, with mask wearing and other safety measures kept in place - *references prior link's research*

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/14/health/Covid-schools-social-distancing-3-feet.html>

World Health Organization on physical distancing

<https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-schools>

Dr. Anthony Fauci references

<https://www.cnn.com/videos/politics/2021/03/14/sotu-3-feet-in-schools.cnn>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jonathanponciano/2021/03/14/fauci-says-three-feet-social-distancing-may-suffice-to-reopen-schools/?sh=43e02e412cf3>