

THE SENATE  
STATE OF NEW YORK



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March 12, 2021

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

Howard A. Zucker, M.D., J.D.  
NYS Department of Health, Commissioner  
Corning Tower  
Empire State Plaza  
Albany, NY 12237

Re: Guidance for School Reopening

Dear Governor Cuomo and Commissioner Zucker:

During the Joint Legislative Public Hearing on the Health/Medicaid portion of the Governor's Executive Budget Proposal on February 25, Commissioner Zucker said he hoped to have guidance for reopening schools by the following week. It has now been more than two weeks since that hearing, but educators, students and parents still lack guidance, clarity, and any degree of certainty from the State in terms of moving forward with fully reopening schools for in-person instruction. Both schools and families need time to prepare for any plans and guidance that will ultimately be released by the State, and any further delay will have significant negative impacts on schools' ability to reopen safely for full-time, in-person instruction. Respectfully, I ask that you move to immediately release guidance on this matter.

While our students have been truly remarkable in terms of their resiliency in adapting to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent shutdowns, and enough cannot be said about our teachers and support staff who have gone above and beyond to continue educating our students through new and innovative methods, we are now approaching a full year of our schools being unable to fully operate with in-person instruction. While steps to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 are of course still necessary, given the progress we have made, with appropriate guidance schools can start to return all of our students to in-class instruction.

The crisis caused by COVID-19 has led to unprecedented levels of uncertainty in all aspects of New Yorkers' lives, however, the cause of this uncertainty does not rest solely with the virus. Unfortunately, the State shifting guidance and lack of communication has been a source of confusion and uncertainty at different times throughout the New York State on PAUSE Order. While we certainly understand the immense challenges our state faced during this time, we are over a year into our fight against the virus and the State by this point should have a clear picture on the path forward for our school communities.

Families, teachers, and school districts need a clear picture of what can be done so that students can get back in the classroom, as many of them have long desired to do. The State must also ensure appropriate measures are in place so that they are able to do so safely, including ensuring schools have access to resources they need, like robust testing capabilities for the continued protection of students and teachers.

Because of its direct impact on our workforce, we cannot move to effectively reopen and rebuild our communities, or our state, without ensuring that students are consistently back in school. I urge you to make issuing the guidance and support necessary to enable our school districts to fully reopen to students for in-person instruction a top priority.

As always, I stand ready to assist you in this critical matter on behalf of New York's students on this critical matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sue Serino".

Senator Sue Serino  
41<sup>st</sup> District