



January 7, 2022

Honorable Eric Adams
Mayor of New York City
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor Adams:

We're writing to express our support for your efforts to keep schools open for in-person learning throughout this school year. It is our shared hope that you continue this policy, which puts the needs and well-being of the students first, in the face of mounting pressure to move to remote learning. As you well know, the pandemic and subsequent move away from in-person learning have taken a devastating toll on our children's educational attainment and mental health. Keeping students in the classroom remains the best way to not only stem these troubling trends but, as the data suggests, protects students from harm.

Remote learning has had a detrimental impact on students, one that continues to be felt today. One case study found achievement losses declined at such a rate between fall 2019 and 2020 that, on average, students lost roughly one-third of a year's worth of learning. A study published by the National Bureau of Economic Research found "pass rates declined [on standardized tests] compared to prior years and that these declines were larger in districts with less in-person instruction."^[1] A recent report from the NWEA research group found that "among third through eighth graders, math and reading levels were all lower than normal this fall" and that "the shortfalls were largest for Black and Hispanic students, as well as students in schools with high poverty rates."^[2]

Achievement declines were not the only effects of a move away from in-person learning and the burdens of the pandemic. The American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and Children's Hospital Association declared a national emergency in child and adolescent health citing both a decades-long rise in childhood mental health concerns, but also the tolls of the pandemic:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention researchers quantified that toll in several reports. They found between March and October 2020, emergency department visits for mental health emergencies rose by 24% for children ages 5-11 years and 31% for children ages 12-17 years. In addition, emergency department visits for suspected suicide attempts increased nearly 51% among girls ages 12-17 years in early 2021 compared to the same period in 2019.^[3]

Our student's educational achievement and emotional well-being are best served by being in the classroom. We agree with you that "the safest place for our children is in a school building." [4] According to the CDC's review of various studies on schools and SARS-COV-2 transmission, "...multiple studies have shown that transmission within school settings is typically lower than – or at least similar to – levels of community transmission, when prevention strategies are in place in schools." [5] Many of these studies occurred before vaccination adoption among portions of school-age children and the implementation of test to stay (TTS) which the CDC found that "K-12 schools implementing TTS with layered prevention strategies demonstrated low SARS-CoV-2 transmission in the school setting." [6] This is in addition to the safety and support provided by New York City schools and schools throughout New York State every day.

New York City schools remaining open for in-person learning will set an example for school districts and cities throughout the Empire State and nationwide. It will help more students realize their potential, ensure at least one healthy meal per day, and socialize with their peers and members of their school community. We appreciate your commitment to following the science and putting the educational and socio-emotional needs of our students first, and we hope that throughout these trying times you continue the policy of keeping schools open for in-person learning.

Thank you for your consideration of this most important issue.

Sincerely,



Senator Robert G. Ort
NYS Senate Minority Leader



Senator Andrew Lanza
NYS Senate Minority Deputy Leader

Cc: Governor Kathy Hochul
Dr. Betty Rosa, State Education Department Commissioner

[1] <https://www.nber.org/papers/w29497>

[2] https://messaging-custom-newsletters.nytimes.com/template/oakv2?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20220104&instance_id=49344&nl=the-morning&productCode=NN®i_id=60005894&segment_id=78602&te=1&uri=nvt%3A%2F%2Fnewsletter%2F512006c5-3c0c-5738-938b-c7325601342a&user_id=23142f4706fd42e90f5975a8dd4b3bc6

[3] <https://publications.aap.org/aapnews/news/17718/AAP-AACAP-CHA-declare-national-emergencv-in>

[4] <https://www.npr.org/2022/01/03/1069907437/officials-are-determined-to-keep-schools-open-despite-omicron>

[5] https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/transmission_k_12_schools.html

[6] https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/transmission_k_12_schools.html#anchor_1639603965438