

## **NYS PTA Comments on COVID-19 Guidance in Schools**

The New York State Congress of Parents and Teachers, Inc. (NYS PTA) is proud to represent nearly 250,000 members of NYS PTA, and the parents and families of 2.6 million New York school children. We are highly concerned with recent decisions and confusion over usage of masks in schools, and offer these comments.

First, conflicting messages have led to significant confusion for parents, families, students, educators and schools. Clear communications, especially given constantly evolving data, are critical for meaningful parent and family engagement.

Many parents and families across the state, based on a NYS Department of Health memo released on Friday, assumed their children could attend schools on Monday with a revised indoor mask-optional policy.

We had multiple conversations with state leaders over the weekend, and since, regarding the confusion that this memo caused. While this memo was thankfully later clarified by the State Education Department Sunday, and the Governor's Office Sunday evening, parents and families were left with great uncertainty for several days, and continued to receive mixed messages still on Monday. It appeared as if children and families were given a much-needed break, only to lose it again. This was unfair to our families, who have been supportive of many of the COVID-19 safety priorities, aside from struggling themselves during this pandemic.

Moving forward, we implore state leaders to work with federal officials on clear and consistent messaging for parents and families.

Second, during the pandemic we have supported decisions for student and school safety based on the analysis of current data, including a review of daily infection and positivity rates, reproduction values, hospitalization and death rates, and more recently vaccination rates.

It is our understanding that the CDC informed NYS on Monday morning that the CDC will NOT revise its guidance for NYS schools on usage of masks for indoors, as the CDC has one set of guidance for all states, and will not vary by state. We find this decision to be unacceptable because of New York's extremely low positivity rate and high vaccination threshold compared to other states. We will be requesting the CDC to make these decisions on a state-by-state basis.

While we always prioritize student and educator safety, we fully believe, based on a review of current COVID-19 data, a review of this CDC decision is warranted.

We will continue to communicate our positions to all state parties, and the CDC, with a request for review of the CDC guidance on indoor mask mandates in schools. Therefore:

- We will submit a formal request to the CDC to review the current CDC guidance as applied in NYS, with respect to rules pertaining to mask usage in schools;
- We will ask NYS DOH to review what flexibility NYS has for deviation from the current CDC guidance with respect to rules pertaining to mask usage in schools;
- We fully support a parent's choice in whether or not their child will wear a mask in a school building, or outside on school grounds; and

- We will continue to seek the following priorities for re-opening in September, which had previously been submitted to state leaders:
  - The focus must be on a full reopen of ALL school buildings for ALL children
  - All parents and families should have the option to send their children to a school building full time, 5 days a week
  - All children must be afforded the opportunity to sit in a classroom seat full-time, 5 days a week
  - Health and safety protections should continue for staff and students, according to relevant and timely data of things like reproduction rates, positivity rates, community spread, vaccination rates of staff and students, and approaches to herd immunity
  - Depending on health and safety information including reproduction rates, positivity rates, community spread, vaccination rates of staff and students, and approaches to herd immunity, mask usage and distancing requirements must be analyzed
  - Based on current data, outdoor mask usage should be reviewed for elimination, and indoor mask usage must be analyzed for optional consideration
  - We continue to fully support a parent’s choice in whether or not their child will wear a mask in a school building, or outside on school grounds
  - Remote learning may have to continue to be an option for certain students, especially those with co-morbidity issues or those in unique circumstances
  - Academic intervention services must be a priority with meaningful and early assessment for learning loss
  - As a part of a meaningful reopening strategy, pool testing could be one tool to support health and safety for staff and students
  - Testing should continue as an option for students, with parental approval only

Data from June 8, 2021 reviewed:

- The NYS statewide 7-Day average positivity is 0.48%
- The state statewide 7-Day average positivity has declined for 65 consecutive days
- NYS has the lowest statewide positivity according to an analysis from Johns Hopkins University
- NYS is approaching the 70% vaccination threshold, we are currently at 69.1%

The regional positivity rate is below:

<b>Region</b>	<b>Sunday, June 6, 2021</b>	<b>Monday, June 7, 2021</b>	<b>Tuesday, June 8, 2021</b>
Capital Region	0.61%	0.57%	0.49%
Central New York	0.85%	0.81%	0.76%
Finger Lakes	0.98%	0.91%	0.81%
Long Island	0.46%	0.45%	0.42%
Mid-Hudson	0.46%	0.45%	0.45%
Mohawk Valley	0.74%	0.69%	0.64%
New York City	0.43%	0.43%	0.42%
North Country	0.50%	0.56%	0.53%

Southern Tier	0.67%	0.69%	0.65%
Western New York	0.66%	0.61%	0.54%
<b>Statewide</b>	0.51%	0.51%	0.48%

Know that NYS PTA will continue to advocate for parents and families, each and every day. In February 2021, NYS PTA was extremely honored to receive the National PTA Outstanding State PTA Advocacy Award for COVID-19 Pandemic and Racial Justice and Equity Advocacy Efforts. Read more here: <https://nyspta.org/2021/02/23/nys-pta-and-nys-pta-student-honored-with-advocacy-awards-from-national-pta/>. Please review our NYS PTA COVID-19 resource page here: <https://nyspta.org/home/covid-19/>.

Together, we will shine a light on every child, with one voice.