

NYS PTA Prepared Remarks of President Dana Platin for meeting with Governor Kathy Hochul, February 8, 2022

Thank you, Governor Hochul, for this opportunity to have a thoughtful conversation on how we can best work together to support our students during these uncertain times.

We truly thank your staff, especially Dan Fuller, Mike Mastroianni and Terry Pratt for working with us so closely these past years.

It's our 125th anniversary year, and we know that NYS PTA will be here for the next 125 years to continue to Shine a Light on Every Child with One Voice.

On behalf of our NYS PTA leaders, many of whom are joining me here today, I offer our thoughts on many critical Covid topics for your consideration:

Our focus must remain on a full stay-open of ALL school buildings for ALL children. All parents and families must always have the option to send their children to a New York State school building full-time, 5 days a week.

- We continue to support a parent's choice in whether or not their child will wear a mask in a school building when it is safe to do so.
- We would welcome meaningful discussions, and thoughtful decisions, around a plan on when masks will become optional for students, including conversations around local and regional differences and defined metrics to be used in making these determinations.
- Schools should maximize distancing in all classroom spaces, and use all available other spaces, to see if they can reach distances which would allow children to remove masks when safely distanced.
- We strongly encourage inclusion of multiple mask breaks when children must be in masks due to state guidance, lack of distancing or in other settings where masks must be worn for safety.
- We would like to see multiple daily mask breaks outside of active eating added back to the guidance as soon as possible.

- We would strongly OPPOSE any COVID-19 vaccine mandate for children and students. We do however strongly urge parents and families to have the vaccine conversation with their child's pediatrician.
- Other health and safety protections should continue for staff and students, according to relevant and timely data of reproduction rates, positivity rates, community spread, vaccination rates of staff and students, and other health and safety factors.
- As a part of our 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. We do NOT support mandatory testing of students.
- We support the state's current Test to Stay protocols.
- We do not object to policies which would require adults in school buildings to either be vaccinated or tested on a semi-regular basis.
- Remote learning may have to continue to be an option for limited students, like those with severe co-morbidity issues or those in extremely unique circumstances.
- Academic intervention services must be a priority with meaningful and early assessments which will support academic recovery. And we must find unique ways to support our students with disabilities, many of whom were disproportionately impacted during remote instruction.

Most importantly, we can't thank our teachers, school leaders and school related professionals enough for all they do each and every day for our children.

Lastly, we truly thank you for your partnership, and for always listening to our concerns. While we may not always agree, we will always appreciate these meaningful conversations, as together, we can make every child's potential a reality.