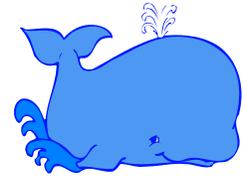


Suffolk Region PTA



Stephanie Gurin
Legislative Chair – Advocacy Team
stephieg@optonline.net
516-236-2781

On First Day of Office, Governor Hochul Announces Comprehensive Plan to Help Ensure a Safe, Productive Return to Schools This Fall

On her first day in office (August 24, 2021), Governor Kathy Hochul announced a new, comprehensive plan to help ensure a safe, productive return to schools this fall in the midst of rising COVID-19 numbers fueled by the Delta variant. As part of this plan, Governor Hochul has directed the New York State Department of Health to institute a universal mask requirement in all schools, public and private, as determined necessary at the discretion of the Commissioner. The Department of Health will issue the requirement through regulatory action established by the Public Health and Health Planning Council.

Governor Hochul will also pursue options to mandate vaccines for school employees or require weekly testing in the absence of vaccines, and will continue to work with the Department of Health, education stakeholders and the Legislature on establishing the mandate.

Governors' Strategies to Reopen Schools Safely

The Public Health and Health Planning Council passed an emergency regulation and the Health Commissioner issued a determination requiring all teachers, administrators and other school employees to submit to weekly COVID-19 testing unless they show proof of vaccination, with either a CDC

vaccine card or the Excelsior Pass. The emergency regulation, which authorizes the Commissioner to require weekly testing or proof of vaccine, will apply to all schools in New York State until it is no longer necessary as described in the language of the regulation.

The Governor also announced that the New York State Department of Health released its official guidance for classroom instruction. These new actions follow the Governor's announcement of a mask requirement for everyone in school buildings during instructional hours and extracurricular activities. The guidance prioritizes in-person learning and details recommendations and requirements for vaccinations, face masks, physical distancing, and testing to monitor potential transmission, among other areas.

<https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2021/09/school-guidance.pdf>

Virtual Open Meetings Law Reauthorized

Governor Hochul signed a bill that reauthorization the ability of local governments to meet virtually under the Open Meetings Law. The new law reauthorizes virtual meetings until January 15, 2022. Under the executive orders issued during the state's COVID-19 disaster declaration, local government bodies were able to hold their meetings virtually without permitting in-person attendance of either members or the public. This ability ceased upon the expiration of the disaster declaration in June 2021.

The law, Chapter 417 of the Laws of 2021, once again allows local government bodies - including school boards - to meet via conference call or a similar service (such as videoconferencing), so long as two conditions are met. First, the public must have the ability to view or listen to the proceedings. Second, the proceedings must be recorded and later transcribed. Under this law, holding meetings virtually is a local option.

Campaign to Drive COVID-19 Vaccination Rates Among School-Aged New Yorkers Statewide #VaxtoSchool

The #VaxtoSchool campaign was launched by Governor Hochul to support COVID-19 vaccination rates among school-aged New Yorkers, furthering the

administration's commitment to making the health and well-being of students, teachers and families a top priority.

As part of this campaign, the Governor announced a new, dedicated website at ny.gov/vaxtoschool with critical resources and materials for parents and guardians of school-aged New Yorkers and school communities. The new site includes information, and an FAQ for parents and guardians. The State has launched a new Instagram channel, @VaccinateNY, to educate school-aged New Yorkers and their families about the COVID-19 vaccine directly.

As part of this effort, the Governor also announced that new #VaxtoSchool pop-up COVID-19 vaccination sites will be open in areas where zip code data shows the vaccination rate for 12 to 17-year-olds is lower than the statewide average. A community-based medical professional will be available at each site to answer any questions parents and guardians of school-aged New Yorkers may have. Alongside the new sites, #VaxtoSchool buses, a mobile vaccination effort, are being launched in convenient, school-centric areas statewide, such as public recreational spaces like basketball courts and parks. This will help to make the vaccine available and accessible to school-aged New Yorkers and their families.

The State is also working with New York colleges and universities to support their back-to-campus efforts, including the integration of the State's Excelsior Pass at SUNY and CUNY campuses statewide so they have a secure, verifiable means of accepting and tracking proof of vaccination and/or negative test results, as applicable, for students, teachers and campus staff.

Two Nassau County School Districts Sue Over Mask Mandates

The Massapequa and Locust Valley School Districts have joined forces in a lawsuit against the statewide mask mandate. According to the lawsuit, the Locust Valley Central School District and Massapequa School District are suing Gov. Kathy Hochul, the State Department of Health and Health Commissioner Howard Zucker. The suit maintains that the DOH nor the governor have the authority to issue a statewide mask mandate.