January 3, 2022

The Honorable Kathleen Hochul
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul:

As a local school board accountable to the Eastchester community, our top priorities for the families we serve must always focus on student safety, learning and wellbeing. Our overarching goal this school year has been to operate school as normally as possible while maintaining healthy conditions that minimize student and staff quarantines. We write to ask that you consider the following measures to enable schools all across the state to operate safely while maximizing in-person instructional time:

● Please consider providing metrics that, if met, would eventually enable schools to operate safely without the need to continue wearing masks indoors. Establishing specific thresholds, along with corresponding explanations, would provide a powerful incentive for families to maintain a set of mitigation strategies during non-school hours, which is crucial to school and community health given we have seen little evidence of in school COVID transmission.

● Please consider providing state-level technical assistance for Test to Stay (TTS) for individuals considered close contacts. While permission for TTS has been granted through local health departments, TTS is difficult for school districts to operationalize given hurdles such as the need for Limited Service Laboratory status and reliably sourcing rapid antigen test kits. Implementation of TTS will greatly reduce lost school time for our district, which so far this year exceeds 1,500 lost in-person instructional days stemming from 300 close-contact quarantines generating no discernable cases among those quarantined.

● While we acknowledge COVID vaccines as a primary strategy for reducing severe effects from COVID, we also observe that for some families, the prospect of mandated vaccination remains an extremely contentious issue. Educationally and operationally, our district must be concerned about the potential impact of a vaccine requirement on students’ access to in-person learning. Students do best while physically in school and we must strive to provide a safe environment that accommodates all students in our district. We ask that New York State continue to play a key role by making COVID vaccines and information as accessible as possible through numerous public locations so that families who choose to vaccinate their children may do so quickly and easily.
We remain firmly committed to maintaining our primary goal of keeping students safely learning in school and the three items above, if adopted together, would be extremely helpful in this regard.

Sincerely,

Board of Education, Eastchester Union Free School District

Cc:
Mary T. Bassett, M.D., M.P.H., Commissioner of Health, NYS Department of Health
Senator Shelley Meyer
Assemblywoman Amy Paulin