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## Senate of Pennsylvania

August 19, 2021

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Ms. Marybeth Torchia  
Superintendent of Schools  
Boyetown Area School District

Mr. Robert Rizzo  
Superintendent of Schools  
Spring-Ford Area School District

Dr. Patrick Winters  
Superintendent of Schools  
Twin Valley School District

Dr. Bret A. Cooper  
Superintendent of Schools  
Daniel Boone Area School District

Dr. David C. Finnerty  
Superintendent of Schools  
Pottsgrove School District

### SENT VIA EMAIL

#### **RE: Mask Mandates for the 2021-2022 School Year**

Dear Ms. Torchia, Mr. Rizzo, Dr. Winters, Dr. Cooper, and Dr. Finnerty,

I am writing to urge you to implement a mask mandate as part of your health and safety plan for the upcoming school year. It is vital that we have our children back in the classroom and to do that we must do everything we can to make classrooms safe. This is not the time to do what may be politically expedient or to leave this decision to individual parents and their preferences. Your decisions must prioritize the health and safety of all students and staff and, in turn, the health and safety of your district's larger community. At this time, there is still much about this virus that we do not know. Like any other virus, it is evolving and adapting to human behavior. We have to be ready to pivot and change our own behavior to keep up with the situation as we continue to learn how best to keep ourselves and others safe.

What we do know is that the Delta variant is [between](#) 40% to 60% more contagious than the original COVID-19 virus (the Alpha strain). We know that vaccinated people can transmit this variant and that unvaccinated individuals, including children under 12, are the most vulnerable to getting infected with the Delta variant. [According to the American Academy of Pediatrics](#), more than 120,000 COVID-19 cases were reported among children between August 5 and 12 - about 18% of the total weekly case count. Pediatric COVID-19-related hospital admissions are at their highest level since the onset of the pandemic. On top of that, a potentially even more concerning variant, [Delta Plus](#), has started to gain ground around the world. So we are far from out of the woods.

While the numbers continue to show that severe illness, hospitalization and death are rare in children who are infected with the virus, there are still many unknown risks. Preliminary studies are showing that [children can be Covid “long haulers”](#) and may continue to suffer periodic symptoms such as fatigue, breathing difficulties, heart palpitations, headaches, muscle and joint pain, fever, dizziness, and more, even after recovering from a mild or a-symptomatic COVID infection. For children, there is also the concern of multi-inflammatory syndrome, or MIS-C. Although rare, it is a very serious COVID-related systemic inflammation that has [sickened some 4,000 children](#) and caused 36 deaths in the U.S. Regardless of how dangerous the delta variant may be for children, there is no getting around the fact that as more children contract this super-contagious variant, the more children will be affected by severe or long-term illness. With risks like long COVID and MIS-C and so many unknown factors about new and upcoming variants of COVID, it is *always* better to err on the side of caution and do more, not less, to protect against it.

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reversed its mask guidance](#) and now recommends that schools embrace universal masking regardless of vaccination status, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has also [called for schools to enforce universal masking mandates](#) and, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends all people keep wearing masks [regardless](#) of their vaccination status.

California, Louisiana, New Jersey, Oregon and Washington state intend to require masks for all students and teachers. In one 4,000-student school district in Arkansas, where masks were not required, [over 800 students and staff had to be quarantined because of exposure](#) in just over a week after classes started. A school district in [North Carolina switched it’s optional mask policy](#) to make them a requirement after more than 80 students had to quarantine within the first four days of school. In Hawaii, [nearly half the students in one school were asked to quarantine](#) after three students, one each from first, fourth and fifth grades, tested positive. A Florida district that allowed parents to “opt out” of the mask requirement had to [quarantine 440 students two days into the school year](#) after 51 students and faculty tested positive for COVID-19. If our goal is to have children back in school and learning in person, then requiring masks will greatly increase our chances of having a consistent safe and healthy learning environment for our students and greatly decrease the chances of having mass quarantines or school shutdowns.

Along with requiring universal indoor masking, each school district should take advantage of the Wolf administration’s [vaccination clinic and testing initiatives](#). While these initiatives are optional, I would ask that you require participation, in particular in the free testing program, for each school in your district. Both of these programs will help increase overall protection and the testing program specifically would provide regular data about the effectiveness of your ongoing mitigation efforts so that you can make the best, informed decisions throughout the school year.

Addressing protections against COVID-19 is a public health issue; it cannot be left to individual preferences. Your health and safety policy should seek to protect your district community as a whole. One person’s choice to not wear a mask puts others at risk and the role of your policy should be to minimize that risk. Wearing a mask is a safe and effective way to protect against COVID-19 for both children and adults. Given the risks, given what we know, and what we don’t know, masks should be mandated in order to protect all of our school students and staff as well as our communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Katie Muth', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Senator Katie J. Muth, PA-D44

CC: **Dr. George F. Fiore**, Executive Director, Chester Cnty. Intermediate Unit  
**Dr. Jill M. Hackman**, Executive Director, Berks Cnty. Intermediate Unit  
**Dr. Regina C. Speaker**, Executive Director, Montgomery Cnty. Intermediate Unit  
**Jeanne E. Franklin**, Public Health Director, Chester Cnty. Dept. of Health  
**Janet Panning**, Interim Health Administrator, Montgomery Cnty. Dept. of Health  
**Noe Ortega**, Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Education  
**Alison Beam**, Acting Secretary of Health, Pennsylvania Department of Health  
Individual members of Boards of Supervisors for the above school districts