

Dear Legislators:

I am disappointed that parents who are voicing legitimate concerns during BOE Meetings are viewed by some as parents accusing teachers of harming students. That is not true. Both teachers and families have been under high stress since the start of the pandemic: parents trying to be enforcers of remote learning which was challenging in a home environment, teachers doing double the effort to teach online with lots of additional time commitment outside of class time to ensure completion of assignments, etc. This does not even address the additional stress on many teachers, who also had to manage their own children's remote learning as well. When we switched back to in person, teachers took great risk to come back to school to teach in person and then were given the additional responsibility to be the enforcers of masks and other district Covid policies that went beyond the mask mandates themselves.

Having lived through 2 years of Covid protocols in schools and masking, parents, especially those with the youngest of learners, fully understand the negative impacts and developmental delays resulting from classroom learning while wearing masks. One size state mandated masking policy is most dramatically impacting the most vulnerable students: young students embarking on language acquisition, ELL students, SPED students, those with visual and auditory issues, etc. Many other states with mask policies had generous carveouts for such students, CT did not. Why? Where we are in February of 2022, with more data on the success and failure of protocols such as masks, vaccination availability, and the endemic Omicron variant(s), does not reconcile with the conflicting talking points from state and federal bureaucrats and does not justify continuing to use students as pawns for continued federal funding, power and control. Remaining on the current path is in no way the proper way forward.

It is important to remember that over 700,000 of our residents are 18 and under and they represent 20% of our population here in CT. They have parents that live here too. Parents are relying on you to do what is right and it is time to end these mandates now. Do not extend the governor's executive powers, and the legislature should not codify the EOs into law. When this school masking finally ends, some students will bounce back quickly, some will struggle and catch up, and some, those that with the most significant developmental delays and learning challenges, the very same students that were most vulnerable developmentally right from the start, may not bounce back because of the policies that our state enforced and we all have followed during their window of opportunity for learning acquisition. Some states made carve outs for this population, why did CT not do the same?

We now must focus on these most vulnerable students and their families and help them in any way we can, but the first step must be to lift the mandates immediately. New Canaan Public Schools was the leader at the start of the pandemic going remote (the very next day!) and bringing us back into school buildings full time the next school year. We all must now again be the same brave and thoughtful local and state leaders: it is time to end the mask mandates and support parental rights and allow mask choice in our schools. Please end it now!

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