



MANASQUAN BOARD OF EDUCATION

Eugene Cattani, Jr., Board President

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August 13, 2021

The Honorable Philip Murphy
125 West State Street
P.O. Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Governor Murphy,

You are receiving this letter on behalf of the Manasquan Public School District and its Board of Education. This letter is a follow up to the resolution passed by our Board of Education on June 15, 2021 and forwarded to your office as well as the offices of State Senate President Stephen M. Sweeney, Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, the 30th Legislative District's representatives in the state Senate and General Assembly. In short, that resolution requested that all mandatory provisions related to school operations during the pandemic be repealed and replaced with recommendations that could be implemented more effectively at the local level.

As you are aware, the Manasquan Public School District had an extremely successful 2020-2021 school year given the circumstances. Our K-8 school opened in September with 5-days-a-week, full day instruction for our whole student body. Our high school operated on a hybrid, but still full day, schedule, with students attending every other day for instruction until April 19, when full day, 5-day-a-week instruction was offered for our entire student body. The reason we were able to accomplish this level of success, when many other districts in the state were not, was because of the decisions made by stakeholders on the local level, who knew best what our community needed to open schools safely.

We were disappointed on August 6, when, at your press conference in East Brunswick, you announced you would be stripping us of that local control and replacing it with another statewide mandate requiring face coverings. This far-reaching mandate does not consider any of the circumstances or conditions present in the Manasquan School District and community. Making these decisions from Trenton for school districts across our state not only removes the home rule which made us so successful throughout this ordeal, but also undermines the trust between local communities and boards of education.

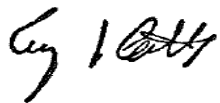
We request that you immediately repeal this mandate and replace it with the language originally published in your "Road Forward," school reopening guidance. This guidance was appropriate in its message to districts in that it offered common sense approaches to mitigation that could be layered and implemented by local authorities based on the conditions of the buildings, outdoor facilities, and communities that they are most familiar with.

Not only do we consider your new mandate unnecessary, overreaching, and counterproductive to the goal of returning students to school, the rhetoric that has surrounded the announcement has been divisive and irresponsible. You even went so far as to say publicly on August 9, 2021 that anyone supporting an optional mask policy is, “willing to sacrifice our kids for politics.” To suggest that months of careful and thoughtful planning by local boards of education is akin to “sacrificing our kids,” serves no productive purpose other than dividing our communities.

There was a point during this pandemic when much was unknown about this disease and difficult decisions, like closing schools for the final months of the 2019-2020 school year, had to be made by the executive branch of the State government. That time has passed. On June 7, 2021 you tweeted “school officials are empowered to make the best decision for their buildings and communities.” We hope you will follow your own advice in this regard.

Sincerely,

Members of the Manasquan Board of Education



Eugene Cattani, President

Alfred Sorino, Vice President

Bruce Bolderman

Donna Bossone

Martin Burns

Terry Hoverter

Joseph Loffredo

Tom Pellegrino

cc: Stephen M. Sweeney, Senate President
Craig Coughlin, Assembly Speaker
Robert W. Singer, Senator
Sean T. Kean, Assemblyman
Edward H. Thomson, Assemblyman
Monmouth County Board of Commissioners
Edward Donovan, Mayor, Borough of Manasquan, New Jersey
Town Council, Borough of Manasquan, New Jersey
Angelica Allen-McMillan, Ed.D., Acting Commissioner of Education
Lester Richens, Ed.D., Monmouth County Executive County Superintendent
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