

# Syosset Central School District

Dr. Thomas L. Rogers  
Superintendent of Schools

## Board of Education

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February 10, 2022

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

Dr. Mary T. Bassett  
Commissioner NYS Dept. of Health  
Corning Tower, Empire State Plaza  
Albany, NY 12237

SENT VIA – US Mail and Electronic Mail

Dear Governor Hochul and Commissioner Bassett,

Please allow this letter to serve as the Syosset Central School District Board of Education's request for clarification as to the criteria the State is using to quantify risk in connection with public health crises and to determine the necessity of mitigation factors in schools.

For the last 23 months, the Syosset Central School District has focused on three key goals: keeping students and staff safe, preserving our excellent quality of education, and deliberately returning to as many aspects of pre-pandemic learning as possible – starting with returning to in-person learning.

At the onset of the pandemic, means of reducing the severity of infection were limited, so the sole strategy open to us was to make our environment as inhospitable to COVID-19 as possible. To do so, we have aggressively pursued layered mitigation measures to reduce the transmission of the virus and maximize in-person learning. However, some mitigation strategies are not without costs in terms of compromising students' experiences and the community-building nature of our institution.

As we approach the two-year mark, the threat posed by the environment has decreased and the case counts relative to COVID-19 have continued to fall. Thus, it stands to reason that at some point the risk will have diminished to the point where some or all of the existing layers of our mitigation strategies will no longer be required. Although the Governor has publicly deemed that conversation premature, we cannot underscore enough how important it is for School Districts and their communities to be able to understand how the State is quantifying that risk and how it evaluates the balance against the costs of individual mitigation strategies.

Disclosing these criteria would not only provide the public with transparency about the evolution of mitigation measures in schools, thus avoiding sudden, disruptive changes in protocols, but it would also allow School Districts lead time to prepare responsive action before any shift in the State's risk mitigation response. By disclosing these criteria, it would also signal how or when the State would respond, should the positive current trends reverse.

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The Honorable Kathleen Hochul & Dr. Mary T. Bassett

Indeed, the absence of such disclosures undermines existing mitigation policies by making them appear arbitrary, even where those policies may be well-reasoned.

Lastly, the lack of criteria has turned a discussion about a continuum of conditions, risks, and countermeasures into a binary on/off debate that has needlessly polarized communities. The conversation is not premature, rather it is simply occurring without your leadership and the daily cost of delay in transparency is increasing fragmentation and frustration in our communities.

We understand the worry that criteria which subsequently evolves in response to new research or evolving pathogens might prove confusing, but it is far more unsettling to try to land the plane from its two-year holding pattern while flying blind.

Your caution and your action in the face of this public health crisis have been crucial. We now need your leadership to instill some well-earned predictability for school and family planning.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Thomas L. Rogers".

For the Board of Education  
Syosset Central School District  
Dr. Thomas L. Rogers, Superintendent