

## Salem Washington Academy

41 East Broadway  
P.O. Box 517  
Salem, New York 12865  
(518) 854-7855

February 16, 2022

Honorable Kathy Hochul  
Governor of New York State  
NYS State Capitol Building  
Albany, New York 12224

Commissioner Mary T. Bassett, MD, MPH  
New York State Department of Health  
Corning Tower, Empire State Plaza,  
Albany, New York 12203

Dear Governor Hochul and Commissioner Bassett,

As a duly-elected public official (s), I (we) am/are writing to you on behalf of the Salem community and school district.

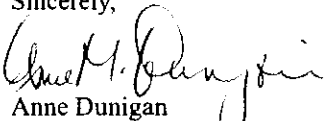
The members of the Salem Board of Education are extremely proud of the way in which our students and community have responded to the COVID pandemic. The efforts of our community to adhere to the frequently modified COVID guidelines have allowed our district to maintain daily in-person instruction. The flexibility and patience that our families and students have demonstrated has been impressive and should be commended.

On February 9, 2022, you announced that the state-wide mask mandate would be lifted on February 10, 2022. However, that declaration did not apply to schools and masks are still required to be worn inside our school buildings. During this press conference you also noted that the mandate for schools would be re-evaluated in early March, but you have yet to provide a specific date or the exact metrics that would be used to guide this decision.

This conflicting guidance has created a great deal of confusion and frustration within our community. Attempting to defend the mandate to our communities and the families we serve has been a significant challenge. It is hard to rationalize how a student can participate in a travel athletic programs (i.e. basketball), go to the movies, attend birthday parties or other social gatherings all unmasked, but when that same student comes to school in the morning they have to wear a mask and be socially distanced from their peers. From our perspective, it is now time to forge ahead and to remove the mask mandate within our schools, and to adjust the quarantine procedures accordingly.

We do appreciate the efforts from your offices on providing At-Home test kits and for implementing the "Test to Stay" program. Both of these programs have been important in maintaining daily instruction for our students. However, it is now time to begin our return to normal.

Sincerely,

  
Anne Dunigan  
Board of Education President