



Hamilton Township School District

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July 21, 2021

The Honorable Phillip D. Murphy
State of New Jersey
Office of Governor
225 W. State Street
P.O. Box 001
Trenton, New Jersey 08625

Dear Governor Murphy,

Please accept this letter on behalf of the elected members of the Hamilton Township Board of Education ("Board"). Our District is committed to "Learning, Growing and Achieving Together." Our school community met and continues to rise to meet the unprecedented challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Through our Board and Administration, we implemented the New Jersey Department of Education ("NJDOE") Road Back Guidance and provided educational opportunities for our children both in person and virtually, via our Road Back Plan. Our dedicated staff worked tirelessly to ensure that our students returned safely to our classrooms.

Pursuant to the direction of the NJDOE, you entrusted districts with the responsibility of providing a local framework for our Road Back Plan. However, in carrying out our responsibility to the children of Hamilton Township this year and moving into the 2021-2022 school year, we struggle with the contradicting and sometimes confusing guidance from the NJDOE, the New Jersey Department of Health ("NJDOH"), the Center for Disease Control ("CDC") and your office via Executive Order and Recommended Guidance. Despite this, our District worked diligently to create a Road Back Plan to best support the children, staff and families of Hamilton Township and is working to create a Road Forward Plan for the 2021-2022 school year.

As a Board it is our role to support our school leadership and question the lack of consistency in expectations across multiple settings throughout the state and the failure of the NJDOE, NJDOH and your office to provide clear and consistent direction to local schools. In addition, the direction provided by the NJDOE and NJDOH often differ from the CDC recommendations. The consequences of the divergent guidance regarding COVID-19 protocols for masking, quarantining, isolation, physical distances, and other areas brought forth by the state, both in school and on school buses or at school events, creates conflict and uncertainty for our school community.

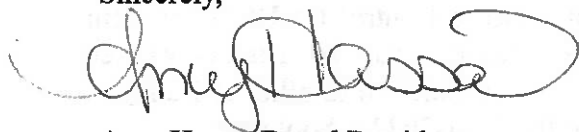
These contradictory expectations place school officials in the difficult position of navigating conflicting expectations for the same school community. At times these expectations are in compliance with CDC and general State Guidance and at other times they are school specific. For example, during the end of the 2020-2021 school year Executive Order 175 required students

to remain socially distanced and masked, even while outside, and End of Year Activity Guidance was released by the NJDOE allowing for no social distancing nor masks during outside graduation ceremonies. In addition, most recently the Road Forward Guidance leaves it up to Districts to determine whether masks may be worn in school, but they are required to be worn in a non-air-conditioned school bus based upon CDC Guidance? Furthermore, the Road Forward Guidance encourages physical distancing but requires all students to be in school for a full day, creating difficulty on how to achieve these goals. The Teachers, school nurses, and administrators are now left in the compromised position of having to address these contradictions with our students and parents. Also, the Road Forward Guidance cautions districts that this guidance may change based upon the CDC Guidance. It is now the end of July, when will these changes occur as planning is already underway.

This lack of consistency has resulted in conflict among community members and between parents and the school district. In light of our desire to safely return all students to school, we are writing to respectfully request that you clarify the Road Forward. That you create clear direction and guidance for school districts. While we realize the situation is fluid, we are ready to step forward and embrace a firm plan led by the State, to assist our school community in getting back to normal. We also ask for the courtesy of improved communication for clear and consistent guidance for schools. In addition, we respectfully request timely guidance from our County Offices prior to press conferences. It is challenging to stop the business of educating students in the middle of the day to listen to a press conference to determine what schools will be responsible for next. Much of the guidance that has been provided is received after planning has already occurred. Socially-emotionally our students and staff are exhausted from this past year, they need certainty and clear expectations, so we can move forward productively. In planning for our district, we need to be able to be prepared to answer both staff and parent questions, without this clarification this will be difficult to do.

We look to you Governor Murphy to provide leadership to the volunteer leaders that are responsible for our most vulnerable and precious citizens, OUR CHILDREN. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Amy Hassa", with a large, sweeping loop at the end.

Amy Hassa, Board President
Hamilton Township Board of Education