



Westfield Academy & Central School District Board of Education

Committed to Excellence

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January 26, 2022

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

Dear Governor Hochul,

For the past two years the Westfield Academy and Central School has had a number of mandates imposed by New York State to combat the COVID-19 virus. Whether it was school closures, mask mandates, social distancing, contact tracing, quarantine orders, or testing requirements, we have closely adhered to the orders of the State. We did so because it is the law, but just as importantly we trusted the State's response would keep our students and staff safe. The shared goal was not only safety, but to return our school to a pre-pandemic environment.

Unfortunately, after two long years of enduring ever-changing mandates, it is clear the State's response is not working. In the last twelve months the State and federal governments have overpromised and underdelivered when it comes to managing COVID. President Biden's pledge to "shut down" the virus is not aging well, and your overconfidence in the President's strategy has stymied our students' educational and social development. Most important though, the COVID-19 mandates you implemented when school began in September of 2021 have not kept our students and staff safe.

The numbers tell the truth about the State's COVID mitigation strategy. Since you implemented your mandates, we have never had more students and staff infected with COVID-19 than we do now. As we draft this letter to you, our school is closed to in-person instruction due to staffing shortages caused by COVID infections. We have been forced to deliver instruction via remote learning which is our least desired form of meeting our students' educational needs.

As elected officials we know how hard it is to admit that a strategy you believed in is not working, but again, the numbers don't lie. We have no doubt you were well-intentioned when you imposed these mandates, but the "one-size fits all" model you have followed is not working. It is long past time for Washington and Albany to recognize that those best situated to undo the damage that has been done to our schools sit in communities just like ours.

It is time to move away from a culture of mandates, and move instead towards a culture of trust and shared responsibility, which gives decision making related to COVID back to individual school districts in close cooperation with their county health departments. We have very good people in place who know how to keep our students and staff safe. It is time to let them do their job because our students' and staff's physical and mental health cannot endure a third year of New York State's COVID strategy that resembles the first two.

We look forward to your prompt action in returning decision making back to our State's schools.

Very truly yours,

Wendy Dymant, President
Phyllis Hagen, Vice-President
Barbara Fay
Deanne Manzella
Kim Maras
Celia Molitor
Tom Tarpley

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cc: Chautauqua County Executive Paul Wendel
New York State Senator George Borrello
New York State Assemblyman Andrew Goodell