



COUNTY OF BUCKS

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONERS

55 East Court Street, Doylestown, PA 18901
(215) 348-6000

County Commissioners

DIANE M. ELLIS-MARSEGLIA, LCSW, *Chair*
ROBERT J. HARVIE JR., *Vice Chair*
GENE DIGIROLAMO

Margaret A. M^cKevitt
Chief Operating Officer

August 29, 2021

To all Bucks County School District Board Members:

The last 18 months have been among the most challenging year and a half any of us have had to endure. As community leaders we have had demands and difficulties thrust upon us which none of us anticipated or ever wanted. It is easy to forget how unique this time has been. There is, in the entire world, not a single living person who has ever had to govern, during a pandemic like this one. None of us entered the positions we are currently in because we wanted to run a government, or a school district, during the worst pandemic in over a century. Nevertheless, we are in positions of power, where decisions have to be made. Shakespeare may have said it best - "heavy is the head that wears the crown". The County Commissioners have a clear understanding of the difficulties you are facing because we face them as well.

The beginning of the school year is always a time of excitement and possibilities. We, like you, would love nothing more than for the 2021-22 school year to begin without concerns about the pandemic. We are not alone in this longing for normality. Parents, children, teachers and school staff are right there alongside us. Earlier this summer we all had visions of a "normal" school year because case counts, positivity rates and hospitalizations were incredibly low, and it looked like we had put Covid behind us. Clearly, that's not the case. As the situation in Bucks has changed, the County has acted accordingly and modified its recommendations. The decision to recommend that schools begin the year with mandatory masking in place was not taken lightly, but the Bucks County Health Department, and the Commissioners, feel it is appropriate. The County Health Department has also gone further by recommending mandatory staff vaccinations in schools. The County itself has issued such a mandate for its staff. These actions are based on the scientifically proven and safe vaccines which are available. Vaccination is the surest way to truly end the pandemic, and the County continues its call for every eligible resident of our county to get vaccinated as soon as possible. We also want to encourage families to get their younger children vaccinated as soon as that age group is allowed to do so.

In recent weeks school boards across the county have met to discuss their Health and Safety plans for the school year. As independently elected officials, the creation and administration of these plans is within your powers. The Bucks County Health Department has made its recommendations on how schools should be operating at this time. Most districts have chosen some form of mandatory masking for the beginning of the school year. We know the pressures and criticism these boards have faced from residents and parents on both sides of the debate. Some of that pressure has been respectful and circumspect, but we know too much of it has been harsh and unfair. We know the decisions are not easy. For those districts who have chosen to begin the school year with a "mask optional" approach, we respectfully remind you of the Bucks County Health

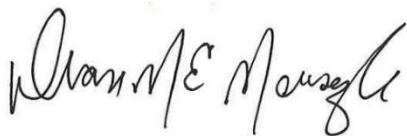
Department's view on following CDC guidance, especially with younger students who are not yet eligible for vaccination. If we have learned anything from the past 18 months about Covid it is that it is unpredictable. None of us know what the next weeks will bring which is why the County feels that starting the school year with more stringent mitigation measures is better.

The Bucks County Health Department is committed to working closely with all our schools to limit the impact of the pandemic as much as possible. Regardless of what path the districts follow on masking, the Health Department will continue to be a resource and partner. For those who begin with a mask optional plan it is important to note that the Bucks County Health Department will be carefully scrutinizing cases in your districts and may strongly recommend a more strict masking policy if the situation warrants it.

We want to express our thanks for your service and our commitment to continue as partners as we navigate this next stage of the pandemic. All of us want the end of Covid-19 to come sooner rather than later. All of us appreciate the importance of keeping our children safe and the undeniable value of in-person learning. It is our sincere hope, as we are sure it is yours as well, that this school year will end on a more healthy and happy note.

Sincerely,

Bucks County Board of Commissioners



Diane M. Ellis-Marseglia, LCSW
Chair



Robert J. Harvie, Jr.
Vice Chair



Gene DiGirolamo

cc: Bucks County School Superintendents