

# Monmouth County Superintendents' Roundtable

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As district leaders, it is our responsibility to ensure that our school systems meet state and legislative mandates. Throughout the past 15 months as we grappled with a global pandemic, we have developed and implemented complex school re-opening plans, relying upon medical expertise, Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) guidance. We have worked tirelessly to ensure that our students return to our classrooms. Our outstanding faculty and staff, community partners, and local medical officials have ensured that we met and exceeded all requirements set forth by the guidance in the New Jersey Department of Education's blueprint for reopening schools in September, "The Road Back". Once deemed eligible by the state, we partnered with community medical centers to expedite the vaccination process for our school community members-faculty, staff, and students. Our work in ensuring a safe environment for all has been exemplary.

However, in carrying out the mandates set before us, we have struggled as leaders with confusing, and at times, contradictory guidance regarding masking, quarantining, isolation, and other intricacies brought forth throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Inconsistencies between varying Executive Orders issued by Governor Murphy have placed members of our communities at odds with school administration-and, one another, over school-based requirements for children. For example, while one mandate requires students to remain socially distanced and masked, even when outside, another announcement is made that allows for no social distancing nor masks during outdoor graduation ceremonies. While athletes have been allowed to compete against one another unmasked, they have not been allowed to shake hands. Such contradictory expectations confuse our public and place school officials in the difficult position of navigating divergent expectations for the same school community. At times, these actions are in compliance with CDC requirements and at other times seem to be school specific. We share your frustration regarding these wildly inconsistent expectations.

As we look toward a normal return to school in September, we will continue to work collaboratively and with a unified voice at both local and state levels to mitigate inconsistencies in state guidance regarding the children we serve. We are united in requesting that Governor Murphy and state officials understand the implications of the divergent guidance regarding COVID-19 protocols for schools upon our children, especially the sharply differing expectations for masking. We will continue to push for measures that guard the safety of our students and staff while taking into consideration the rapidly evolving COVID-19 landscape. We will continue to amplify your voices to state leaders and ask that you continue to make your voices heard with your legislators. Together, we can ensure a vibrant start to the 2021-2022 school year in September.

Thank you for your continued support.

Monmouth County Superintendents