

GARDEN CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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*Inspiring Minds
Empowering Achievement
Building Community*

November 24, 2020

The Honorable Kevin Thomas
New York State Senate
900 Stewart Avenue, Suite LL45a
Garden City, New York 11530

Dear Senator Thomas:

The Board of Education of the Garden City Union Free School District wants to thank the Governor's office, the Department of Health, and the State Education Department for direction and leadership during these unprecedented times. As we have complied with executive orders and directives, we feel it is necessary to publicly express our grave concern with the undue burden continued to be placed upon school districts, taxpayers, staff and students as a result of recent executive orders and associated direction from the Department of Health with regard to COVID-19 Micro-Cluster Zones. While these and previous executive orders and directives intend to protect the safety of communities, their unintended consequences are overly cumbersome and extraordinarily expensive for school districts that already have a difficult burden due to the state mandated tax cap. Moreover, they often come at the expense of our students' education and social-emotional well-being.

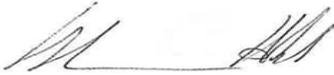
This summer our District and wider community spent countless hours analyzing frequently changing guidance and conflicting information in order to provide a flexible reopening plan for our community. We spent time analyzing air exchange, student-classroom density and traffic flow. We established new protocols for masking, screening, walking, eating and playing. We repurposed school-spaces into classrooms and reassigned teachers wherever we could. We hired more staff. Nearly half of our students are receiving hybrid instruction because of this cumbersome and unclear guidance. As a result of our efforts our schools have remained open (1 building was closed for 1 day) and our children have had continuous learning since September. Recent spikes in COVID reported cases among our students and staff have resulted from community spread – outside of the schools.

All of these efforts have come at great expense to the District: we have spent over two million dollars meeting State and DOH guidance, ensuring that our students and staff are safe and have access to high-quality technology. All of these requirements have come at great expense to students as well – to their academic learning, to their athletic and artistic pursuits, to their social emotional state, to their relationships. We must now use those investments to keep schools open and to expand our engagement with students in these cold winter months. Closing schools and isolating school-age children, while allowing other non-essential businesses to remain open, is problematic and misguided. Our students need to be in school with their peers in order to support their well-rounded development.

Furthermore, we encourage the Governor to introduce legislation that provides emergency aid to all school districts to assist with the costs of meeting these obligations. This will allow our District to continue in-person learning and develop a strategy to bring all of our students back – safely and smartly – while meeting the currently unfunded mandates imposed on school districts.

We look forward to hearing from the State regarding adjustments to and funding for these mandates and hope the State will respect the local autonomy of school districts. Most importantly, we implore that the State prioritize keeping our schools open.

With our regard,



William Holub
President



Tom Pinou
Vice President



Stefanie Granville
Trustee



Michael Cassaro
Trustee



Matthew Wakeham
Trustee