Governor Murphy, Acting Commissioner Allen-McMillan, and Commissioner Persichilli Announce 2021-2022 School Year Guidance

TRENTON - Governor Murphy, New Jersey Department of Education (DOE) Acting Commissioner Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan, and New Jersey Department of Health Commissioner Judy Persichilli today announced a series of coordinated recommendations and guidance documents to assist school districts and educators as they develop local reopening plans for the 2021-2022 school year. All public school districts in New Jersey are expected to provide full-time, in-person instruction for the 2021-2022 school year. Documents released today will be critical as districts plan for full-time instruction and continue the pathway to recovery from COVID-19.

Today's guidance includes health and safety recommendations that provide strategies to reduce risks to students and staff from COVID-19, while still prioritizing full-time, in-person learning; a self-assessment of district readiness to accelerate learning and to provide supportive school climates; and a compilation of specific, research-backed priorities and practices to accelerate learning. The health and safety guidance document released today replace the protocols outlined in Executive Order No. 175 and in the NJDOE's The Road Back.

"The recommendations we are releasing today will provide school districts with a roadmap to bring students and staff back to safe, enriching school environments," **said Governor Murphy.** "This guidance will help districts and educators develop plans to meet their student's educational, social, emotional and mental health

needs. Our students and educators have displayed amazing resiliency during the pandemic, and I am pleased that the upcoming school year will provide a sense of normalcy that students haven't had since March 2020."

"These documents mark a significant milestone in our battle against COVID-19; an actionable blueprint for the return to full-time, full-day in-person instruction," **said Acting Education Commissioner Allen-McMillan.** "I am hopeful that these resources will empower our school communities to return all students safely to the classroom and ensure that all students, regardless of zip code or circumstance, receive a high-quality education that empowers them to compete for educational and work opportunities in the increasingly global marketplace."

"While this guidance will help schools plan for Fall, the best way to keep schools open and safe is to get vaccinated," **said Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli**. "Now is the time for parents of children between the ages of 12 and 17 to schedule a COVID-19 vaccine appointment to allow enough time for that second shot before school starts."

School Year 2021-2022 Health and Safety Guidance

The [guidance document](#) details recommendations designed to provide a healthy and safe environment for students and staff during the 2021-2022 school year. These strategies are recommendations, not mandatory standards. The absence of one or more of these strategies should not prevent school facilities for opening for full-day, in-person operation. Schools are encouraged to implement as many layers as feasible while providing full-time in-person instruction.

The strategies and procedures include, but are not limited to:

- Maintaining physical distance between students to the extent practicable. This recommendation must not prevent a school from offering fulltime in-person learning; districts should implement physical distancing only to the extent they are equipped to do so while still providing regular in-person school operations.
  - Interventions to aid with social distancing include facing desks in the same direction and avoiding group seating arrangements.
- Putting procedures in place to identify and respond to a student or staff member who becomes ill with COVID-19 symptoms.
- Maintaining close communication with local health departments to share information and resources on COVID-19 transmission, prevention, and control measures and to establish procedures for notification and response to illness. Schools should also maintain transparent and ongoing communication, as appropriate, with their staff, students, and caregivers regarding school operations

and health and safety information.

Updated CDC guidance on masking in this setting is expected prior to the start of the 2021-2022 school year and will factor into the final recommendations from the State for masking this fall. However, barring a significant change in health metrics, school districts will be able to determine masking policies at the local level. Regardless of the district's policy on masking, schools cannot prevent students or staff from wearing masks if they choose.

Reopening Self-Assessment for the 2021-2022 School Year

DOE is also releasing a self-assessment tool that school districts may use to develop and implement interventions needed to successfully transition to fulltime, in-person learning. The self-assessment provides guiding questions and resources in various topics, including learning acceleration, supporting the social-emotional needs of students and educators, attendance, discipline, support for student subgroups, and districts' financial obligations.

Learning Acceleration Guide: A Compilation of Principles and Practices in New Jersey

Additionally, DOE is releasing a guidance document that will complement the self-assessment by providing specific research based principles and strategies to accelerate learning and prepare students for the new school year. This resource is designed not only to help recover from COVID-19, but as a long-term, comprehensive framework that anchors districts' academic, social, and behavioral interventions to the common purpose of promoting global competitiveness for all students.

The three documents can be found on the DOE website.