

September 14, 2021

Alison Beam
Acting Secretary of Health
Pennsylvania Department of Health
Health & Welfare Building
625 Forster Street, 6th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Noe Ortega
Secretary of Education
Pennsylvania Department of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-03333

Dear Acting Secretary Beam and Secretary Ortega:

This letter is written on behalf of the Board of School Directors of the Spring Grove Area School District ("Spring Grove"). We are submitting this letter to share our concerns regarding the August 31, 2021, Order of the Acting Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health that, among other provisions, directs face coverings in school entities (the "Order").

The mission of the Spring Grove Area School District is "to provide a safe and engaging learning environment" for its students. We are charged to do this "in partnership with our families, businesses, and community organizations" in our District. We believe that the requirements of the Order impose limitations and contradictions in the enforcement of its provisions that put the District at odds with its partners because of the limited guidance and identified support for implementing its specifics. Moreover, we believe that school districts, in general, and Spring Grove, in particular, are directed to implement an Order that has failed to be otherwise effected statewide.

Since the end of the 2020-21 school year, the focus of our District has been singular: to return our students to our school buildings, to deliver an engaging educational experience, and to provide a safe environment in which to interact with their classmates and our staff. As required, Spring Grove developed and approved its health and safety plan and implemented it as directed by federal and state authorities. As locally elected officials who are charged with carrying out the duty of providing for the educational programming of our resident students, we believe that we were successful in meeting the requirements set upon us this past summer.

Furthermore, we believe that the Order, issued on August 31, has placed the District in an untenable position. Upon its issuance by the Department of Health, multiple parents and other members of our community expressed their intent to defy the Order and send their children to school without masks. This has placed our schools and staff at risk for unnecessary and unwarranted protest actions that keep our attention from our primary mission. The recent communication from the York County District Attorney has placed the enforcement squarely on our shoulders with minimal, if any, recourse.

We, as a Board, have struggled with the apparent disregard by the State of our success in implementing our own health and safety plan. As administrators and board members, we studied the new Order, its implementation, and its impact on our programming and our students. Very quickly, we determined that its contradictory provisions are problematic, at best, and untenable, at worst. The concerns for potential disciplinary actions because of, apparently, unenforceable parameters, leaves very few options for the orderly conduct of our educational program.

Despite our concerns, we are honoring the spirit of the Order and are taking every step within our ability to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our buildings. We will continue with the provisions included in our original health and safety plan which has been implemented with success to date:

- We will provide masks to all students who enter our buses and/or our buildings.
- We will continue our mitigation plans for promoting good hygiene, maximize physical distancing where practicable, continue rigorous cleaning and sanitation of our interior environments, and maintain proper HVAC practices.
- We will require our staff to wear face coverings.
- Additionally, we will continue to work with the Department of Health staff and respond to cases of COVID-19, support contact tracing, and promote positive interaction with our families.

We take our responsibility to act as a local governmental unit and a member of the community seriously. In turn, we ask for further guidance and clarification from the Departments of Health and Education in a timely manner regarding this extremely difficult situation.

Sincerely,

Spring Grove Area School District
Board of School Directors

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President

Rachel Rohrbaugh

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