July 23, 2020

Dear Governor Cuomo,

We would like to invite you to meet with the Sayville Schools Board of Education and leaders of our teacher association. We also want to help you appreciate the value of brick and mortar schools.

Your news conferences have helped us understand how and what we are doing and why. You have dispelled the unknown. That has helped us manage our fear. Most importantly, you have kept us safe even though that has often meant protecting us from ourselves. Thank you!

Regarding the value of brick and mortar schools, you conveyed your lack of confidence in “the old model” of school where everyone “sits in a classroom and the teacher is in front of that classroom.” You asked why we need “all these physical classrooms. Why? With all the technology you have?”

We are writing this letter to help you understand why our children need schools. We encourage you to see this through the lens as leader as well as a manager. We share your enthusiasm for remote learning. We have prided ourselves on our use of instructional technology for many years.

Socializing with one’s peers is one of the most essential benefits of brick and mortar schools. Learning how to socialize at school is just as essential to a child’s success as what they learn in class. Further, we believe the hyper-focus on testing coupled with an attempt to substitute technology for teaching will undermine student’s mental health and wellness. Next to poverty, the declining mental wellness of children today is undermining whatever academic advances we hope to make. Lauding technology and criticizing schools may appeal to your management skills. We are asking you to lead by listening.

We want you to understand a few things about our children:

- Todays’ school children spend more time on computers and are less mentally well as a result. Researchers note that teens spend nine hours each day on-line, spend six to eight hours on-line (up to 12 years-old), and fifty minutes on-line for kids between 0 and 8. The more time children spend on-line, the more likely they are to have at least one outcome related to suicide, like depression or making a suicide plan. How can children show resilience while their neurology is being rewired against it?
• **Today's school children are more anxious than ever.** Studies note that anywhere between 15 and 30 percent of all children will have anxiety disorders before the age of 18. Compare this to the 8-10% of children with ADHD or the 10-20% of children with depression. How can children wracked by such anxiety learn?

• **Today’s school children are more anti-social than ever.** Researchers note that the number of teens who get together with their friends each day has been cut in half in the past 15 years. All the lessons learned by interacting with one's peers are lost. How children succeed in college and the workplace when schools are abandoning socialization in favor of isolation?

We believe that what our school children need now more than ever are School leaders not managers. We are asking you to join with us and lead with us in a partnership together.

Thank you,

Sayville Board of Education
Sayville Teachers Association

cc. NYS Senator Phil Boyle
    NYS Senator Monica Martinez
    NYS Assemblyman Andrew Garbarino