



September 30, 2021

The Pennsylvania Principals Association represents nearly 3,500 principals, assistant principals, directors, supervisors, and other administrators across the commonwealth. Our members lead elementary, middle, and high schools, while others work in central offices that serve the needs of every student in their school district. Some of our members have chosen to lead in schools where they are also parents and/or community members. Some of our members have declined opportunities to advance because of their deep dedication to the children, the staff, and the community they serve. All of our members have chosen a career with the primary purpose of ensuring that the students they serve are provided the best education possible.

While our members have a wide range of beliefs that create debate about politics, health, or educational pedagogy, we come to agreement on an important factor: our students need to be in school, in an environment intended to embrace their learning needs. In-person instruction is essential to the educational achievement of every student we serve. We are now witnessing the effects of last school year. We have students who are lagging behind benchmarks of achievement we know are necessary for them to advance through an instructional scope and sequence that will ensure their success in subsequent grades and even after graduation. We have students who are struggling with mental health issues that have been exacerbated by a lack of support associated with not being in school on a regular, full-time basis. If our students are not present every day, in a safe environment, their education, their social-emotional wellness, their future, and the future of our communities is jeopardized.

In a recent survey we conducted with active members regarding the current issues surrounding the mask mandate, we received responses from 449 members. Respondents were evenly divided between elementary and secondary administrators. They represented rural, urban, and suburban school districts in all 29 intermediate units across the state. Of those, 89% indicated that their school district was following the order from the Department of Health (DOH). Of the 11% who indicated they were being asked to carry out an action that contradicted the order from the DOH, many indicated that they were directed to accept exemptions from parents without any medical documentation indicating they had a medical need that prohibited them from wearing a mask. Fifty-seven respondents (13%) indicated that they felt their job was in jeopardy because of the contradiction between the mandate from the state and the directive from their school boards.

The most astounding result from our survey revealed that 44% of respondents have “been **threatened** by a parent, student, or community member as a result of the Mask Mandate.” Our

members are not in any seat of power or authority that gives them the ability to make a decision about who should or should not wear a mask. Unfortunately, the recent events that have taken place surrounding the fight over “the mask mandate” have our members serving as enforcers of a rule that is totally out of their control. They have been placed squarely in the headlights of the proverbial game of chicken between the entity that provides the certification they are required to possess to carry out their duties (the Department of Education), and the entity that provides their paychecks (local school boards elected by taxpayers and community members). Our school leaders have been threatened, attacked, ignored, and criticized because they are asked to follow the order issued by the Department of Health or follow the wide range of schemes designed to outwit that order.

The Pennsylvania Principals Association does not wish to engage in the political debate associated with this contentious issue. We simply want to go on record saying that whatever it takes to keep our students in a healthy school and classroom environment needs to take place. If masks and social distancing are a means to that end, then we support that. While wearing a mask may be uncomfortable, distracting, and restricting, if it ensures students can be present in an in-person environment, then it is necessary. If contact tracing and quarantining of small groups ensures the well-being of the majority, then we support that. The safety of our students and educators is just as important as the adequate and appropriate delivery of instruction.