



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

ROY COOPER
GOVERNOR

KODY H. KINSLEY
SECRETARY

January 5, 2022

The Honorable Deanna Ballard
North Carolina Senate
300 N. Salisbury Street, Room 521
Raleigh, NC 27603

Dear Senator Ballard:

Happy New Year and thank you for your letter to Secretary Cohen on December 29, 2021 regarding the StrongSchoolsNC Toolkit. I appreciate your support of our shared goal of keeping students learning in person and in school in the safest way possible to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19.

As you may know, North Carolina was one of only a few states in the country to provide a comprehensive guidance document on how to operationalize prevention measures to keep students, staff, and teachers healthy for classroom instruction. The StrongSchoolsNC Toolkit (Toolkit) includes up-to-date prevention guidance based on the science and data about reducing the risk of viral transmission in schools. NCDHHS updates the Toolkit regularly as new information and data is available and works closely with the Department of Public Instruction and Local Health Directors to support implementation of these strategies. **The Toolkit itself is not a legally enforceable document, but rather strong recommendations for schools on how to reduce the spread of COVID-19.** Data indicates that school systems that have implemented the Toolkit have experienced less viral spread in schools and consequently fewer disruptions to in-person instruction. The Toolkit does include references to certain statutory requirements for schools, including required control measures that may result in exclusion from school for those who contract COVID-19 or have certain types of exposures to COVID-19. We hope that schools will use the mitigation strategies in the Toolkit to limit spread and therefore minimize the need to use the control measures which may result in exclusion from schools.

Regarding your question on the recent recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Test to Stay, NCDHHS is working with the ABC Science Collaborative and incorporating its pilot study findings on reduced transmission in schools where masks are required for all students, teachers, and staff, at the end of this week. We are working closely with the NC State Board of Education on these changes, which will be reviewed at their upcoming meeting on January 6.

Should you have additional questions, I am glad to set up time to discuss further.

Again, thank you for your interest and support in keeping students safe for in-person learning.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kody H. Kinsley".

Kody H. Kinsley
Secretary