The independent organizations appearing on this statement support the science-based principles behind the Erie County Department of Health's school guidelines published on August 23, 2021.

The rapid spread of the Delta variant of SARS-CoV-2 is now infecting children in many parts of the country, sending many of them to the hospital. Infected children may also spread this more contagious virus to family members and friends who are more susceptible to infection.

The accumulated evidence gathered by the medical community in the past year of the COVID-19 pandemic provides the basis for the safe return to school. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Erie County Health Department, among many others, have taken the lead in promulgating the framework for safety. The Erie County Health Department published guidance is available on their website. Along with the use of the best scientific evidence, Erie County school districts had significant input in the operational aspects of this guidance.

Key aspects of this guidance are:

- The use of a “layered” approach to safety interventions. This includes mandatory facemask use for everyone at school since this has been shown to be one of the most effective means of preventing spread of the COVID-19 virus. Maintaining proper physical distancing, increasing air quality especially in classrooms, screening for fever and symptoms, and disinfecting surfaces are additional layers of protection.
- Protocols to screen, evaluate and manage students and staff who may have COVID-19 infection or exposure to someone with infection have been clearly delineated.
- Vaccination of all eligible students and school staff is strongly encouraged as the best means of preventing spread and serious illness.
- Transparency in all aspects contained in the guidance is highlighted.

The undersigned organizations encourage all families with school-age children to understand the important reasons for developing the guidance to facilitate safe return to school. Furthermore, they remind healthcare providers of the important role they play in educating their patients about these important preventive medicine interventions.
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Buffalo Healthy Living is a media sponsor of the WNY COVID-19 Working Group.

The ILI/COVID Working Group of Western New York was formed in response to local variation in approach to the diagnosis and treatment of Influenza-Like-Illness and COVID-19 in the region. It is a collaborative effort of hospital systems, academic departments, independent practice associations, and insurers. The logos and signatures on this document represent the organizations' support of this statement.

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