



For Immediate Release

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WNY EDUCATION ALLIANCE ANNOUNCES #THE180DAYPROJECT: AN EFFORT TO KEEP STUDENTS IN SCHOOL ALL YEAR

(Buffalo, NY – September 1, 2021) With most schools set to begin in Western New York next week, the WNY Education Alliance is launching **#The180DayProject**, an effort to raise awareness of the importance of keeping all students in school, in person for 180 days this year.

School closures over the last two school years have had a very negative impact on many children educationally, socially, and emotionally, and have done little to slow the spread of Covid-19. In fact, it is likely that the closing of area schools, where mitigations were followed and transmission rates were exceptionally low, put children at much greater risk of becoming infected with Covid-19.

According to one of the most comprehensive studies on the impact of school closures on children and the safety of schools titled “Is it Safe to Reopen Schools? An Extensive Review of the Research” ([March 2021 by John Bailey](#)), “Learning deficits and widening achievement gaps are difficult to remedy and can have lifelong consequences as measured by high school graduation, college attainment, income earnings, and even mortality rates.”

The science is now very clear that school closures result in a meaningful net harm to the vast majority of school-aged children, even during periods of high community transmission. We should rely on proven mitigations to both protect students and keep schools open.

As part of this project, WNY Education Alliance will share research and data that highlights those efforts that are working to keep children as safe as possible while ensuring that schools remain open this year.

One area of concern remains the unnecessarily restrictive quarantine policies being implemented by the Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH). Instead of disrupting school by quarantining close contacts or an entire class, many scientists and public health experts are advocating for the use of rapid tests to allow asymptomatic close contacts to stay in school if they are not infected.

Margery Smelkinson, an immunology and infectious-disease scientist, recently wrote an article in the [Baltimore Sun on August 30, 2021](#), titled “Maryland schools need a Test-to-Stay program.” In the article, Dr. Smelkinson highlights the ineffectiveness of quarantines as a



mitigation strategy and the importance of using testing to allow close contacts to stay in school this year.

Dr. Smelkinson summarizes her research by stating that “Keeping students in the classroom is an essential part of fixing the damage wrought by last year’s extended school closures. Parents must insist that districts reserve quarantining for students with positive tests and use testing, wherever possible, to minimize educational interruptions for all other students.”

WNY Education Alliance calls on the public health departments in Western New York to follow the advice of Dr. Smelkinson and others and to follow the lead of other public health departments, such as the California Department of Public Health, in using testing for close contacts, in lieu of unnecessary quarantines or class closures, to minimize the health risks associated with Covid-19 while maximizing time in the classroom.

Students, parents, teachers and school administrators also play an important role in taking measures to prevent transmission in order to keep schools open throughout 2021-22. The effort to keep schools open for 180 days will require the support and collaboration of everyone.

Children cannot afford to have their education interrupted for a third straight year.

While the school reopening process has become unnecessarily political, the reality is that schools can and should remain open to full-time, in-person instruction this year now that the vaccine is available to at-risk groups, now that we understand the damage caused by arbitrary school closures and quarantines, and now that mitigations, including the testing of close contacts, have proven effective in limiting transmission in schools.

We need to rise above our political differences for the sake of all children in Western New York and come together to ensure that schools remain open all year.

Please help us raise awareness of **#The180DayProject** by forwarding this to friends, school district stakeholders, and state and local government officials. Together, let’s make school a reality for all students in Western New York this year.

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WNY Education Alliance

WNY Education Alliance is a non-partisan organization committed to improving education in the Western New York area through advocacy, community engagement, and strategic partnerships.