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MEMORANDUM

TO: School District Superintendents
FROM: Richard Corcoran 
DATE: April 14, 2021
SUBJECT: **Planning for the 2021-2022 School Year**

Florida continues to outwork and outperform the nation in the number of students receiving a high-quality education in an in-person educational setting, and our success has been rooted in schools, districts and the state implementing learned best practices and constantly relying on science and evidence.

Throughout the successful reopening of our schools for in-person instruction, we have consistently provided families with the ability to make educational decisions that are in the best interest of their children. Our efforts ensured parents had the ability to choose from multiple learning modality options for the current school year, with the option to transition to new modalities when their child may have required another option to ensure they were achieving adequate progress.

Florida has once again proven that one-size-fits-all policies do not meet the unique needs of individual students or their families. Therefore, we should continue to make surgical – not sweeping – decisions to mitigate large-scale educational disruptions as we are planning for the upcoming 2021-2022 school year.

As you reflect on the current school year and look ahead to 2021-2022, an example of a one-size-fits-all policy are the mandatory face covering policies in some districts and schools. Upon reviewing the policies of those districts with mandatory face covering policies, reviewing all districts relevant health data, and factoring in such data points as the percentage of students learning in-person and the relative population of a county (which is often synonymous with a county's community health resources), **the data shows us that districts' face covering policies do not impact the spread of the virus.**

Face coverings are a personal decision **and certainly families and individuals should maintain their ability to make a decision that is unique to their circumstances.** Broad sweeping mandatory face covering policies **serve no remaining good at this point in our schools.**

Mandatory face covering policies inhibit peer-to-peer learning in our classrooms and they may also unintentionally create a barrier for students and families who would otherwise choose in-person instruction if such a policy were not in place. **Such policies may also impede instruction in certain cases, especially for students with disabilities and English language learners who benefit from viewing a teacher's face and mouth.**

Planning for the 2021-2022 School Year
April 14, 2021
Page Two

As we are planning to provide our students with robust summer programs and welcoming students returning to school in the 2021-2022 school year, we expect more students to participate in face-to-face instruction. Right now, our schools are safer than the communities at large. This safety record should only increase next school year with the increased availability of vaccines.

With this return, **we ask that districts, which currently are implementing a mandated face covering policy, revise their policy to be voluntary for the 2021-2022 school year.**

Florida's districts and schools have done an incredible job implementing, learning and improving upon mitigations and protections for our students, educators, school leaders and Florida's entire education family. Without a doubt, our teachers and school leaders are heroes and they have led the nation in reopening Florida's schools, while giving families broad choices for their child's education. Let us continue to support those choices for our families as we ready ourselves for the 2021-2022 school year.