



NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

NORTH CAROLINA SENATE

December 29, 2021

Secretary Mandy Cohen
N.C. Department of Health and Human Services
101 Blair Drive
Raleigh, NC 27603

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

Dear Secretary Cohen:

As you wrap up your time with the Department of Health and Human Services, I want to thank you for your service to the state of North Carolina. I have no doubt that this has been a challenging season for you. Please know that we appreciate your leadership.

Earlier this month, you attended the Joint Legislative Commission on Governmental Operations, Subcommittee on Use and Distribution of Federal COVID Funding. I asked you whether the StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit ("Toolkit") is a "recommendation, a law, or a suggestion." You replied that you wished to consult with a lawyer before answering, so I write today to ask if you spoke to an attorney and are now able to answer whether the Toolkit is a recommendation, a law, or a suggestion.

I am also interested to hear your perspective on updated CDC guidance that includes the "test-to-stay" strategy. The CDC said testing students frequently after exposure to someone with Covid-19 can limit transmission while avoiding large numbers of quarantines to allow for in-person learning. Just today, the ABC Science Collaborative has released data showing use of this strategy did not result in increased transmission in schools. Do you plan to align with CDC guidance on the "test-to-stay" strategy? Should we expect to see this strategy reflected in the Toolkit?

We all are acutely aware of the learning loss that has occurred among our students in North Carolina. I believe that we need to continue to keep students in the classroom. Some still have not recovered from the school closures, and the sad reality is some never will. Clarity on the nature of the Toolkit and quarantine procedures would help our districts prioritize in-person learning.

I appreciate your leadership during this time. I wish you the best as you step away from your role as head of the Department of Health and Human Services.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Deanna Ballard".

Senator Deanna Ballard

CC: Kody Kinsley, Incoming DHHS Secretary