Assemblywoman Mila M. Jasey

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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*Assemblywoman Mila Jasey (D-Essex Morris) released the following statement regarding the SOMSD Schools reopening impasse*:

This morning, the South Orange-Maplewood community awoke to the distressing news that mediation between the District and SOMEA had broken down and that the determination of when our schools will reopen will travel a litigation pathway. This development means that we are now the only suburban Essex County school district with no in-person learning.

My office has received hundreds of emails and telephone calls requesting that this situation be addressed. Several weeks ago, I published a statement indicating my belief that school reopening was contingent upon the ability of teachers to be vaccinated and assurance that ventilation issues were being adequately addressed to insure that our classrooms are safe for educators and students alike.

It is not lost on me that our local YMCA is providing child care in our elementary schools.

I took measures to ensure that the construction project approvals that the residents of our communities overwhelmingly voted to bond were completed by the NJDOE. That has been accomplished. Vaccine availability has been expanded to include educators and ventilation should not be a problem with the onset of spring.

While academics are extremely important, the mental health and well-being of our students is even more critical. A return to in-person learning is essential to restoring some level of normalcy.

I strongly advocated for local control because the determination to move forward toward a safe and reasoned return to some in-person classroom time should be made by those who drive policy and administer day-to-day operations – the Superintendent and the Board of Education. We now, however, find the District at an impasse.

Education policy is my passion, and it frustrates me that the critical role played by educators and support staff in the lives of our children and adolescents is not given the respect that they deserve. That said, they must come to the table committed to an outcome that is in the best interest of the students they so ably serve.

There is nothing we do as a society that is more important than ensuring our children receive a great education. We have the resources and the ability to provide this. Seemingly, all that is missing is the will.

For all of these reasons, I call upon the Superintendent, the South Orange-Maplewood Board of Education and the South Orange-Maplewood Education Association to immediately find a mutually acceptable path to a return to learning that includes in-person instruction.

*Assemblywoman Mila Jasey is Deputy Speaker of the NJ General Assembly, Chair of the Assembly Higher Education Committee, Vice-Chair of the Assembly Education Committee and a former Member of the South Orange Maplewood Board of Education*