

February 15, 2022

Dear MES Families and Staff,

On Monday, February 14th the Connecticut legislature approved a bill requiring students, staff members and visitors to continue wearing masks in schools through February 25th. The legislation ends the Executive Order regarding the statewide mask mandate in schools as of Monday, February 28 and gives the authority to the Commissioner of the Department of Health to lift or extend a statewide mask mandate in schools. It is expected that the Commissioner will lift the statewide mask mandate. The legislation also grants authority to the Commissioners of Health and Education to reinstate the school mask mandate anytime between February 28, 2022 and June 30, 2022 should COVID conditions warrant. Action is not required by local school districts unless they opt to continue a local school system mask mandate.

We have been monitoring our community and school rates of infection as well as state COVID hospitalizations. After surging in the early weeks of January, these numbers are all trending downward and we are hopeful that this will continue. Over the last three weeks, 0-3 positive cases per week are being reported to school. We are fortunate to have an ample supply of at-home test kits, helping to quickly identify and isolate positive cases. We also have high quality masks for staff use. We have also worked to make access to vaccination convenient by hosting a number of free COVID vaccine clinics.

We are writing today to let you know that we are not planning to extend the mask mandate in Marlborough, but instead plan to make masks optional as of Monday, February 28th. With tools in place for school-age students and staff to protect against COVID-19, declining case trends, and decreased community hospitalizations in mind, we have come to this mask-optional point in time. This decision has been made in collaboration with our local health director. Weighing the factors relative to having a local school mask mandate in Marlborough, or to make masks optional, has been a thoughtful decision-making process. While the health and safety of students and staff and their families remains our most important consideration, we are also cognizant of the need to begin to make informed decisions towards a return to normalcy as conditions allow.

Although not mandatory, in concert with public health officials, we recommend and encourage students and staff to wear masks as a mitigation strategy and respect everyone's choices whether or not to do so. The school will not discriminate against any student or staff member who chooses to wear or not wear a mask, nor will we tolerate any bullying or harassment related to a student's (family's) choice as to mask-wearing.

We will continue to work closely with our state and local health departments and the state Department of Education to be adaptable in our decision-making. We are making this change cautiously and will closely monitor all conditions. We will not hesitate to consider a return to mandatory mask-wearing if the Commissioners of the DPH and SDE deem it necessary to reimpose a statewide mask mandate or local metrics become uniquely concerning.

We will continue to let families and staff know when there is a positive case reported to school and recommend that people monitor for symptoms and test. We will continue to distribute at-home test kits for this purpose. Students and staff members testing positive for COVID will still need to quarantine for five days and may return on day 6 and are strongly encouraged to wear masks for five days when returning to school.

There are several school COVID-19 health and safety practices that we will be evaluating in the coming weeks. We do not want to rush to change too many practices all at once so that we are better able to assess and monitor separate variables. Please note, the current federal mandate for masks to be worn on public transportation remains in effect, therefore masks must continue to be worn on school buses, beyond February 25th until further notice. The MES administration will present an updated COVID-19 Operating Plan at the Board of Education meeting to be held on February 24th.

Thank you for your patience, support and respect for one another.

Sincerely,

Wes Skorski

Chair, Marlborough Board of Education

Holly Hageman

Superintendent