



Mountainside School District

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Janet Walling - Superintendent of Schools

February 28, 2022

Mountainside Parents/Guardians and Staff,

As shared previously, the state's masking mandate for schools will be lifted beginning on Monday, March 7th. Over the past few weeks we have received a number of suggestions, opinions, and questions regarding these upcoming changes and the [recent updates from the NJDOH](#). All of these thoughts have been taken into consideration and weighed against the overarching priority of ensuring the safety and health of our staff and students within a successful educational environment. Decisions have also been guided by input from our health professionals and the NJDOH/NJDOE, who have stressed the importance of maintaining other mitigation efforts such as proper ventilation, physical distancing, and consideration of local vaccination rates when implementing changes. Based on all of these aspects, I would like to share the following adjustments and reminders that will take effect on March 7th:

Masking:

- **Masking will be optional for all students and staff within the educational setting and on our contracted school buses**, with the exception of a few situations as noted below. We recognize that the decision of whether or not to continue wearing a mask is a personal one for each family and staff member, and all choices will be respected.
 - If you want your child to wear a mask in school or on the bus please understand that it is your child's responsibility to follow your request. Our staff will not have the ability to monitor who should or should not have a mask based on parent preferences.
- Masking **will** still be necessary in the following limited circumstances:
 - Students and staff returning on days 6-10 of isolation/quarantine will be required to remain masked in school and on the bus as per existing protocols.
 - Close contacts, who are vaccinated, do not need to quarantine but will be required to wear a face mask for days 1-10 while in school or on the bus.
 - Students who are exhibiting symptoms will need to wear masks when in the Nurse's Office.

Close Contact and Contact Tracing:

- The definition of close contact remains unchanged. Anyone who meets the following criteria could be considered a close contact:
 - Close contact is defined as being within 6 feet of someone with suspected or known COVID-19 for 15 or more minutes during a 24-hour period. *The school exception allowing for a 3-foot distance does not apply if students are unmasked.*

- Please be aware that while we are confident in maintaining this definition while unmasked when seated in the classroom or at lunch, we cannot guarantee physical distancing when students are working in small groups or on the bus, which may increase the risk of exposure or close-contact consideration.

Quarantine Instruction:

- Remote instruction will continue to be offered to students with COVID-19 or on quarantine. Students who are unable to follow the masking requirements for return on a shortened quarantine remain eligible for this instruction until the end of their 10 days.

We are very pleased that current circumstances allow us to make these adjustments and are looking forward to the nicer weather which will allow greater opportunities for students to socialize across classes when outdoors for activities such as lunch and recess. We will closely observe any impact these adjustments have on school case rates over the next few weeks with the goal of being able to incorporate additional changes throughout the remainder of the year.

I am aware that some people may feel hesitant about these changes, but rest assured that we are dedicated to making the best decisions for everyone with a focus on their health, education, and emotional needs. We will continue to closely monitor our circumstances, and remain prepared to return to prior protocols if it ever becomes necessary.

It is amazing to see how far we have come as a school community while dealing with COVID-19 over the past two years and I **truly** appreciate everyone's efforts and willingness to support each of our decisions along the way. I look forward to implementing these changes together, and hope that they are a sign of additional ones to come!

As always, thank you for your continued support and I wish you all a nice week.

Mrs. Janet Walling