

February 16, 2022

Dear Staff and Parents/Guardians,

I write to update you briefly on our path forward related to COVID and masking that was discussed at last night's Board of Education meeting. The Board voted unanimously to suspend its policy on face coverings/masks. The final motion read: "Move that the Board of Education approve the suspension of Policy 4118.237/4218.237/5141.8 Face Masks/Coverings until such time as the Board reviews and approves an amendment to the policy." This will allow masks to become a personal choice by staff and students beginning February 28, 2022 when the Executive Order mandating masks ends. If you did not get a chance to attend or listen in to the meeting, we have **attached** the Powerpoint for easy access.

Just to reiterate, we heard many individual opinions on mitigation strategies in our schools, including masking, and we want to thank those who reached out to share thoughts and express individual concerns on this topic. We certainly listened and understood the myriad of varying issues, and we crafted very specific practices that we will develop or maintain as a result.

Some highlights of the meeting included the following points:

- Students must continue to wear masks on all buses (both to and from school) based on the federal regulation on public transportation
- No changes will be made at this time in spacing or the addition of lunch waves (providing further distancing) from the beginning of the year
- The distribution of N95 masks and home test kits will continue as requested by staff and families. The DPH has continued to recommend testing as a key strategy in slowing the spread of COVID.
- Project COVID DeteCT testing will be offered to parents for weekly testing of their children through a State partnership (optional), and a letter was recently sent out by Anne Dalton for parent permission/sign up.
- Cleaning and sanitization of bathrooms will continue during the school day
- Air purifiers in classrooms of buildings (without HVAC) will remain
- Continue to maintain the District's COVID Dashboard to monitor trends in our schools
- Revisions will be made to our *Return to School Plan*, which originally outlined a mask optional provision, including new language that addresses the response to any State of CT guidance in the future:

The superintendent will continue to report health trends to the Board of Education during their regular meetings. While masking will no longer be mandatory at this time, the district will continue to employ other mitigation strategies in the schools and outlined in the Return to School Plan. The superintendent will continue to consult with the local health director and the district's health and wellness coordinator to monitor COVID-19 trends, as well as respond to State guidance, and may need to consider temporary changes to mitigation strategies, which may include a return to masking for a clearly defined period of time.

Most importantly, we will be arranging for staff and leaders to have meaningful conversations with students and families regarding mask choice and personal responsibility. The administrative team is meeting on Friday to develop clear and specific plans for these conversations to occur, both at school and at home. *Following that meeting, we will send further information that should be shared with children at home.*

The Public Health Commissioner maintains her authority to make any future amendments regarding the requirement of masks. Please know that we will continue to monitor any trends that warrant discussion or changes to our plans in the future.

If you should have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to us.

Thank you,
Dr. Lorrie Rodrigue, Superintendent

A wide-angle photograph of a coastal dune landscape. A wooden boardwalk, constructed from light-colored planks, winds from the bottom center towards the middle ground, curving to the right. The terrain is covered in tall, green grasses and patches of purple heather. In the background, rolling sand dunes are visible, some with exposed sand. A line of dark evergreen trees marks the horizon under a heavy, overcast sky with grey clouds.

A Path Forward

Newtown Public Schools

Historical Timeline

March 2020 – Shutdown due to COVID

August 2020 – December 2020: Hybrid/Remote with employment of restrictions and State mandates

January 2021 – present: Full, in-person learning with employment of restrictions and State mandates

March of 2021 – started vaccine clinics for staff, and then for students in accordance with the appropriate age level

December 2021 – Screen and Stay; No Contact Tracing

COVID 19 Contacts Quarantined by School

STAFF	CONTACTS	HAW	HOM	MGS	SHS	RIS	NMS	NHS	PRE	NCP	District Total
Quarantined	Currently	6	6	3	3	3	3	2	0	0	28
Quarantined	March	7	6	3	5	15	5	9	5	0	50
Quarantined	February	1	5	2	4	3	4	3	0	0	22
Quarantined	January	14	5	8	10	8	20	28	0	0	93
Quarantined	December	12	5	8	4	1	2	3	0	9	44
Quarantined	November	5	8	20	10	22	11	24	0	8	108
STUDENT	CONTACTS	HAW	HOM	MGS	SHS	RIS	NMS	NHS	PRE	NCP	District Total
Quarantined	Currently	25	4	38	1	27	67	110	0	0	210
Quarantined	March	29	20	38	18	52	85	202	13	0	393
Quarantined	February	6	31	21	18	30	37	80	0	0	223
Quarantined	January	40	25	29	32	22	110	176	0	0	434
Quarantined	December	0	39	3	6	4	4	7	0	8	71
Quarantined	November	10	0	85	8	108	130	147	3	7	498

November 2020 – March 2021

COVID 19 Positive Cases by School

STAFF	CASES	HAW	HOM	MGS	SHS	RIS	NMS	NHS	PRE	NCP	District Total
Isolated	Currently	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
Isolated	March	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	2	0	7
Isolated	February	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	4
Isolated	January	3	0	1	4	0	3	2	0	0	13
Isolated	December	1	0	1	5	2	1	1	0	1	12
Isolated	November	3	1	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	8
STUDENT	CASES	HAW	HOM	MGS	SHS	RIS	NMS	NHS	PRE	NCP	District Total
Isolated	Currently	1	1	1	0	1	5	8	0	0	17
Isolated	March	1	1	1	1	2	10	19	0	0	32
Isolated	February	0	7	1	1	3	5	4	0	0	21
Isolated	January	5	3	1	6	11	12	25	0	0	63
Isolated	December	0	1	4	1	4	2	13	0	0	25
Isolated	November	2	0	5	2	3	15	10	0	1	38

November 2020 – March 2021

October 2021 – February 2022 COVID 19 Positive Cases by School

STAFF	CASES	HAW	HOM	MGS	SHS	RIS	NMS	NHS	PRE	NCP	District Totals
Isolated	Currently	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	4
Isolated	October	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	4
Isolated	November	2	1	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	6
Isolated	December	0	1	3	2	3	0	4	0	0	13
Isolated	January	10	5	19	18	11	15	28	0	0	106
Isolated	February	1	1	0	1	0	1	2	0	0	6
STUDENT	CASES	HAW	HOM	MGS	SHS	RIS	NMS	NHS	PRE	NCP	District Totals
Isolated	Currently	3	1	3	0	2	3	1	2	1	16
Isolated	October	2	8	5	2	5	4	1	0	0	27
Isolated	November	1	0	0	4	3	2	6	0	0	16
Isolated	December	2	4	16	11	18	8	33	0	0	92
Isolated	January	44	28	42	42	68	89	187	7	3	510
Isolated	February	4	3	5	4	5	3	2	3	1	30

STATE OF CT PROCESS



Governor Lamont – press conference to discuss his thinking on lifting the requirements for mask mandate and giving it to local districts. Other states and communities had already moved in this direction.

The General Assembly voted to continue to emergency powers through June 30th and the Senate also voted yesterday to extend masking until February 28th.

The state Department of Health and Department of Education reserve the right to reinstate the statewide mandate up until June 30 in the event of another surge of coronavirus cases.

Recommendation: *Given the freedom for districts to determine the path forward regarding masks, the recommendation is for students and staff to be given the option to continue to wear protective face covering (masks) or to choose not to wear masks. Masks on buses are determined by federal guidance, and all students will need to wear masks to and from school if riding public transportation, until that is changed.*

“We’re transitioning to a different way we have to manage this virus in our lives.”



- Manisha Juthani, State of CT Public Health Commissioner

Continued Protocols – Newtown Public Schools

- Facilitate a deliberate dialogue with students about choice and personal responsibility (school/home)
- Continue requirement for masks required on all buses – federal
- Provide N95 for staff members and home test distribution (staff and students/families)
- Offer access to testing in schools for students (weekly) through sign up
- Continue other mitigation strategies (classroom space, distancing at lunch, sanitization of bathrooms)
- Air purifiers will remain in classrooms
- Ongoing mask breaks, as needed
- Provide access to local clinics for vaccination, booster through community partners
- Encourage ongoing self-monitoring of illness; stay home from school
- Continue current protocols regarding quarantining (screen and stay)
- Continue dashboard of cases (Coordinator of Health & Wellness)
- Monitor cases/trends in consultation with local health director and State DPH

Changes Needed

- ✓ Change the original *Return to School* plan to reflect changes (website), including language that ensures changes to flexibility around masking in school (not on bus).

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/17ZYwaIEOBYOdOprml3xpgNu1NvJ4snhTRsSPLlbn8QU/edit?usp=sharing>

- ✓ Include language in plan in alignment with State's ongoing authority, including provisions outlined in the Governor's declared emergencies that will remain in effect following February 15, 2022 due to public health concerns.

The superintendent will continue to report health trends to the Board of Education during their regular meetings. While masking will no longer be mandatory at this time, the district will continue to employ other mitigation strategies in the schools and outlined in the Return to School Plan. The superintendent will continue to consult with the local health director and the district's health and wellness coordinator to monitor COVID-19 trends, as well as respond to State guidance, and may need to consider temporary changes to mitigation strategies, which may include a return to masking for a clearly defined period of time.

- ✓ Suspend policy regarding Policy #4118.237(a), 4218.237, 5141.8 to reflect new protocols and practices regarding "optional masks"