



PLATTSBURGH CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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MASKING/COVID UPDATE

Dear Parents and Guardians:

As was predicted in my previous communications, and as was widely reported by media outlets yesterday, the Clinton County Health Department has affirmed the Governor's new guidance on masking in schools. More specifically, the recent CCHD press release featured the following: **"The result from today's collaborative planning session was that though masks are strongly recommended by CCHD, they will no longer be required in school settings".**

This updated protocol, per the Governor's timeline, will take effect tomorrow, Wednesday, March 2, 2022. While masks will no longer be required, the CCHD and other public health officials continue to strongly encourage their use, and no student, staff or visitor will be precluded from continued masking. Related, no disparagement, dissent, or bullying of those who elect to mask will be tolerated, and any such actions will invoke the code(s) of conduct.

With the removal of the school masking mandate, public health officials have made clear that other mitigation strategies (distancing, testing, exclusion of symptomatic individuals, etc.) become even more important. So, students should expect that spacing and distancing will continue where feasible, and the district will continue to send test kits home with symptomatic individuals.

As parents, students, faculty and staff will now be making their own decisions about masking, some commentary about vaccinations seems in order. As before, scientific and public health leaders continue to promote vaccination as the best defense against virus spread and against the most severe symptoms for those who become infected. Vaccination rates change daily (as additional individuals become vaccinated and as others move further from their 2nd dose and are no longer considered fully vaccinated without the booster). But, the district's nursing staff has offered the following estimates of current vaccination rates:

- Primary (grades K-2) approx.. 40% (increasing rates with increasing grade level)
- Upper elementary (grades 3-5) approx.. 45% (increasing rates with increasing grade level)
- Middle School (grades 6-8) approx. 68% (ranging from 62% at 6th to 73% at 8th)
- High School (grades 7-12) approx. 76% with initial doses; 31% boosted
- Faculty approx. 95% with initial doses

Again, these figures are estimates and change regularly, but may assist families in making masking decisions.

MISSION

Our mission is to educate each student of the Plattsburgh City School District by creating challenging, supportive, and interactive learning that advances intellectual, physical, social, and cultural development.

This new masking protocol will be applied in other schools in Clinton County and, because public health departments in other North Country counties have similarly-approved this measure, across the entire region.

Some other important updates, details, and reminders about COVID protocols are as follow:

- This new masking guidance is applicable both to the regular school setting and to co-curricular activities such as athletics and clubs.
- One situation in which masking will still be required involves individuals returning to the school setting following the 5-day isolation period because of COVID positivity. Those individuals will need to mask in school for an additional 5-days after their release from isolation. Individuals who do not wish to mask in the school setting following their isolation period may instead follow a 10-day school exclusion and return to school after the required masking period would have ended.
- Our efforts to maximally-distance students in the classroom and cafeteria settings will continue. While the Spring season features outdoor sports for which spectator distancing is far less consequential, certain of our Winter teams continue to compete (Go Hornets!) and spectator distancing in those few remaining indoor events remains important.
- Some co-curricular activities may take place at venues which have imposed their own local masking mandate, and full masking may still be applicable in those instances.
- The school bus setting will reflect the same optional masking as the school setting, but given the nature of the bus environment (smaller, enclosed space in which distancing is more challenging), masking while on the bus remains highly recommended.
- Students who attend CVES programming may expect the same updated protocols.

As referenced in previous communications, we currently hold a large number of at-home test kits which we are eager to share with families. Following very high initial demand, interest in these tests has waned of late. While symptomatic individuals will be sent home with tests, any other (asymptomatic) student or faculty/staff member may request a kit at any time. Please see the appropriate School Nurse for these tests. If multiple positive concurrent cases arise in the same cohort (ie. classroom or team), the district will likely send a test kit home with each student in said cohort – so as to guard against asymptomatic positive cases.

Change is the main constant with regards to COVID protocols and this update, though consequential, will surely be followed by many more adjustments. Public health officials were quick to caution that their support for this relaxed masking protocol depends entirely on continued decreasing COVID data, and that future ‘spikes’ or ‘surges’ might necessitate the re-introduction of protocols such as masking. So, thank-you for your continued vigilance to keep yourself, your family, and our community safe.

With thanks,



Jay Lebrun
Superintendent of Schools

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