

MASK MANDATE UPDATE

On Tuesday, March 30, 2021, Governor Asa Hutchinson announced he has made the decision, in consultation with Arkansas Department of Health Secretary Dr. Jose Romero, to lift the statewide mask mandate effective today. Businesses will still have the right to require customers to wear masks and the Governor asks citizens to respect these requirements.

Arkansas Department of Education Secretary Johnny Key said in the state of Arkansas we are having a successful school year, reporting approximately 80 percent of students receiving onsite instruction.

“One of the reasons for our success has been the layered approach we have taken to following the guidelines and implementing the protections against the spread of COVID-19. Masking has been a critical component of that. With the end of the mask mandate, we are allowing local districts to make the decisions on whether they want to continue to have a mask mandate at the local level.”

School boards will have to take some formal action either to continue, modify, or eliminate mask-wearing policies. Masks may be taken into consideration when identifying close contacts and identifying persons that may need to quarantine.

When reviewing local policies, Secretary Key said school boards need to also consider all of the areas of the school including the buses, lunchrooms, hallways, activity spaces, and special event spaces.

Districts are required to publish their plan for continued safe operation on their website as a requirement of the Federal American Rescue Plan Act. This plan:

- Should be developed with the district’s Ready for Learning Committee
- Posted by April 15, 2021, and receive public comment
- Modified based on public comment for Summer and Fall

Secretary Key also provided updated guidance in regards to quarantining of close contacts:

- If a district keeps a mandatory mask policy and both parties are wearing masks appropriately, the close contact would not be required to quarantine.
- If a district keeps a mandatory mask policy, but at least one of the individuals was not wearing a mask properly then the traditional quarantine guidelines apply.
- If a district chooses to not have a mask policy, then the traditional quarantine guidelines will apply.

The Pocahontas School District has completed the first step in the process by meeting with the Ready for Learning Committee. The next step will be for the Pocahontas School Board to take formal action on the plan for continued safe operation of our schools. Students and school personnel will continue to wear masks until that time.