

Vt. schools to stick with masking requirements for now

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RUTLAND, Vt. (WCAX) - While fully vaccinated Vermonters are now not required to mask in public, public schools, in most cases, will be required to stick to the policy for the foreseeable future.

When the CDC announced its new masking guidelines Thursday, they specifically did not include schools, and Vermont is following that lead, regardless of the number of vaccinated teachers, students, and staff.

“We have to continue to be patient when we are dealing with our young folks who have yet to be vaccinated,” said Don Tinney, president of the Vermont NEA, the state’s largest teacher’s union. He says it’s important to protect all who are not fully vaccinated. And in most schools that is a majority of the student body. “It’s going to require some conversations with all students about this, and I think it’s important that we all understand that we wear masks and we follow the guidelines to protect ourselves and other people.”

Northeast Supervisory Union Superintendent Jeanne Collins says it would be difficult to know which of their juniors and seniors are fully vaccinated. She is thinking about allowing teachers who are alone in their classroom or with other fully vaccinated adults to go maskless. “Because there are only four weeks left of the school year, I really want to keep the practice of adults keeping on a mask around students at all times,” she said.

Mill River Unified Union School District Superintendent Dave Younce says the number of students who will be fully vaccinated before the end of the year is very small. “What we have, an overwhelming majority of our kids are unvaccinated,” he said.

Children under 12 will have to wear masks in all buildings until they are approved for the vaccine. Some parents and grandparents say they will still wear a mask out in public if their child has to. “If I was to have them for a weekend, I would still wear a mask, so they would too,” said Lisa Laplante, a Rutland grandparent.

Do schools expect fully vaccinated students to rebel against the rule? “If you have a student who says, ‘But I don’t have to do it anywhere else,’ we just have to say, ‘Well, these are the rules we have to follow in school and we are four, five weeks away from being done for the school year, so we are going to tough it out and get to the end,’” Younce said.

And being so close to the end has people thinking about next school year. “We’re planning for a return to full-time next year and we’re hopeful that it does not include masks,” Collins said.

Most superintendents we spoke with say they are feeling optimistic about the return to school, and the Agency of Education says they will be really pushing for a full-in person learning for all.