



DRACUT PUBLIC SCHOOLS
2063 Lakeview Avenue
Dracut, Massachusetts 01826
Phone: (978) 957-2660 Fax: (978) 957-2682
www.dracutps.org

Steven Stone
Superintendent of Schools

August 18, 2021

Re: COVID-19 Update: Mask Policy & Mitigation Practices

Dear Parents/Guardians:

As you are likely aware, the Governor and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), after sixteen months of issuing explicit guidance on a wide variety of issues related to COVID-19, recently issued “recommended” guidance on the use of masks in schools this fall. This decision left individual districts to decide how to approach the issue. After promoting the use of data throughout the pandemic, the state has also decided that it will not provide any metrics that could be used to provide a path for local school committees and boards of health to make decisions about mask wearing.

In considering the current impact of COVID in our community:

- On the last day of school (June 16th, 2021) there were no (0) cases of COVID in our schools.
- One year ago, on 8/17/20 there were five (5) positive cases in the Town of Dracut. Today there are currently ninety-one (91) cases. Most relevantly for the school system **twenty-three (23) of those cases are children.**
- **At this time, according to the Board of Health, children account for a higher percentage of active cases than at any time since the beginning of the pandemic.**
- Just two weeks ago, on 8/3/21 there were thirty-four (34) active cases in town, with ten (10) of those being children.

A review of the most current vaccination data indicates that while the percentage of children in both relevant age groups (12-15 & 16-19) in the town who have received at least one dose of a vaccine has improved since mid-July, vaccination rates in Dracut are still below the state average and are generally lower than in other [Merrimack Valley](#) communities:

Age Group	State Average	Dracut (8/12/21)
12-15 Years Old	63%	47%
16-19 Years Old	67%	65%

In two weeks we will open the 2021-2022 school year. Later this week high school sports will begin their fall training seasons. On opening day, we will once again be a single, in-person community as more than 750 students who had participated in remote learning last year, return to our classrooms.

As I expressed at last night’s School Committee meeting, **we will continue to do EVERYTHING we can to ensure the safety of ALL**, and position ourselves to put COVID restrictions behind us as quickly as is possible. We want athletes to have a successful, uninterrupted season. We want performing arts and

other activities to resume in **FULL**.

Last night, in considering the recommendations of the Dracut Board of Health Agent and the district's lead medical professional; and in considering the most recent increases in active cases of children in the community as well as the lower vaccination rate of Dracut's children; and consistent with the recommendations of the *American Academy of Pediatrics* and the *Centers for Disease Control*, **the School Committee voted to apply a universal indoor mask requirement for the start of the school year.**

We will continue our aggressive mitigation strategies: We will continue to retain additional, temporary custodial staffing to maintain our cleaning protocols. We will continue to retain additional, temporary medical professionals to assist our school nurses. We will continue to ensure our facilities are as safe as possible. We will continue to offer additional vaccination clinics. Lastly, we will engage in a vigorous testing program that includes the following components:

- *Routine COVID Pooled Testing* (similar to the program we operated last school year)
- *Symptomatic Testing* of individuals who report to a nurse with one or more COVID symptoms (students who present at home with symptoms should not attend school)
- *Test & Stay Testing* of close contacts which would allow for asymptomatic close contacts to remain in school if participating in the testing program

As I stated multiple times last night, in collaboration with the Board of Health, **the administration will be reviewing available data on a daily basis**, with the hope of revising this policy as soon as is possible. Even as I advocate directly with the Commissioner's office for the state to provide usable metrics to guide decision-making, we are focusing on two metrics in particular: the infection rate of children and the vaccination rate of the age groups that are eligible for the vaccine. Parents and guardians are urged to take steps to minimize the chances of COVID transmission and seriously consider having their children vaccinated.

While we will still have to deal with COVID-19 as the year opens, I am hopeful that a return to full normality is not far away and look forward to a successful school year. As always, if you have any questions about the district's approach to the ongoing health emergency, please feel free to contact me directly.

#MIDDIEPRIDE

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steven Stone". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first and last names being the most prominent.

Steven Stone
Superintendent of Schools