

Dear WUSD Community,

Last night, at a special board meeting of the Windsor Unified School District Board of Trustees, the board decided to go forward with requiring masks on students in grades TK – 5, even when outdoors.

As part of that plan, the amount of time for food intake (not break/recess, not collecting your meal, bussing your trays, etc.) will be kept to 14 minutes. Students will remain masked while in line for hot lunch, will remove them to eat, and then put them back on for bussing/cleanup and recess/break.

These changes have arisen from one goal: to keep our students in classrooms, in order for them to receive “best first instruction.”

The current rules from the California Department of Health allow unvaccinated students to go onto “modified quarantine” following an exposure if (a) they are masked and/or (b) the exposure time was less than 15 minutes in a 24-hour period. Modified quarantine allows students to remain in the classroom, though it does restrict their access to extracurricular activities. The determination of whether an exposed student is placed on modified quarantine or full quarantine, which sends them home for up to 10 days, is done by our county department of health.

Following an exposure, the county investigates the exposure and does contact tracing to identify the exposed and determine which version of quarantine is required by state law. However, among our younger grades we have been unable to provide the kind of proof required by the county to prevent entire classrooms of students being sent home on full quarantine. This is due to the delayed nature of exposures (it can be several days before symptoms, and thus contact tracing starts), as well as the reality that younger children will often struggle to remember if they were

masked or not and who they were playing with or eating lunch with several days prior.

We have tried to mitigate this with assigned seating, but we've still lost multiple classes of students to full quarantine. It is for this reason that this step of outdoor masking and limiting unmasked exposure has been taken. By implementing these policies, we will be able to present a case to county health that will allow more students to stay in class under modified quarantine, rather keeping them removed from class under full quarantine.

We are sensitive to the fact that full time masking is no fun for anyone, that there are families who are opposed to this action. We also acknowledge that it's not a "perfect" solution, but in this case we feel that "perfect is the enemy of good," and that this provides our best chance to protect our kids and keep them in school.

For the rest of this week, schools serving grades TK-5 will be doing a "soft opening" of this policy, with sites and staff to start working on enforcing the new mandate starting today, with a plan for full implementation by Tuesday, September 7.

Though these new rules are only being applied to grades TK-5, we continue to strongly recommend that students and staff at all grade levels mask as much as possible, including outdoors.

At the board meeting, board president Stephanie Ahmad stressed the need for "respectful enforcement," a concept I think we can all get behind. While we do expect enforcement of these new mandates, we don't want a punitive or adversarial relationship with students or families. We would ask that you do your part, by asking your children to abide by the policy and avoiding language at home that may create an adversarial environment at school.

In countries where masking during times of any illness is common for all ages, children are taught from an early age that masks are not about protecting only themselves, but rather protecting their community; that it is an act of compassion and care for other students, teachers, family members, and the larger world they live in. We feel that keeping this idea in mind can be a valuable “teachable moment” for your children as we navigate this challenging time for our community.

Additionally, know that we are discussing the possibility of implementing “mask breaks” for students, because we do understand that six to seven hours of mask wearing can be challenging for young children. But, we are still determining how it might work and how to best implement it. We will have more information to share on this by the end of the week.

As we begin to receive improved data from our vendors on case counts, exposures, and quarantines, we will be reassessing these measures. The first assessment will be at the next regular school board meeting, which is scheduled for Sept. 17.

The only thing one can definitively say about COVID, is that COVID is constantly shifting, and COVID policy must do the same. We appreciate your willingness to shift and pivot as necessary and thank you for your dedication to the safety and well-being of our students.

Sincerely,  
Jeremy Decker  
Superintendent