

# Centerburg Local School District



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Mask Mandate Explanation,

Because the number of email questions about the mask mandate, I will attempt to explain why the school decided to mandate masks at this time.

As of Friday, Sept 3, 21% of the student body of the district were absent. This weekend we were notified of 4 more student diagnosis and 2 more staff diagnosis. We are awaiting quarantine orders from Knox Public Health. We are moving staff around in an attempt to continue to have school due to lack of substitute teachers.

In Ohio, schools are held responsible for student learning. Staff evaluations are based on student achievement on the state mandated tests in April and May. Except for High School, these tests have no effect on anyone other than school staff.

HB 166, which was passed in 2019, mandates schools to be responsible for excessive absences. Absences are tracked by the state, and the student attendance rate is graded as part of the district's final grade each year. If a student is excessively absent, the school is mandated to create a "Personalized Absence Intervention Team" that will create and implement an attendance plan for the chronically absent student. Parents are to be invited, but by law do not have to attend. It is solely the responsibility of the school to implement this plan.

The district has tried through discussions and direct legal means to request a change in quarantine procedures to allow any student identified as a "close contact" to remain in school if they wear a mask. We feel the data supports this. Based on Ohio Department of Health mandate, any student deemed close contact (closer than 3 ft for 15 min without a mask) must quarantine for 10 days. The school has no flexibility and is required by law to enforce this mandate.

When some students were quarantined, the district received requests as to what the district will do to maintain student learning even though, in most cases, the family chose not to wear a mask which caused the quarantine.

Attempting to provide online learning was not successful last year. The data from across the state is clear that temporarily implemented online learning is not effective. Last year the district attempted to use one day a week to help with planning and supplemental online learning. This is not permitted this year. The legislation that allowed public school districts to substitute online learning for school attendance expired with no further actions by the state legislature to renew this ability. If the district uses a day for these issues this year it is counted as a calamity day and the students are not given credit for any of the state mandated learning time. Eventually the district will be faced with making up these days at the end of the school year. The district has been in contact with our local legislators to request action be taken. There has been no response to this request.

A school is allowed to start an online school but only if the district creates a plan that is approved by the Ohio Department of Education. If the plan is approved, then a new IRN (school) is created and online student are enrolled in that new school. There is no process that would allow students to move back and forth temporarily if quarantined. The startup costs and ongoing costs of running a separate online school is not possible for small districts. That is why the district has not offered online as we do not feel the small number of students that would enroll would justify the cost to the taxpayer.

The district is stuck in between state mandated actions by the Ohio Department of Health, Knox Public Health, the Governor's Office and the Ohio Legislature and a divided public that either wants students in mask for safety reasons or feels masks mandates are unconstitutional. It is our desire to find conditions in which students can learn.

Mike Hebenthal, Superintendent