

February 9, 2022

Dear District 101 Families:

Two important pieces of information were provided to us over the past twenty-four hours, and those updates have changed our plan and timelines related to masks and related mitigations.

1. The first of those clarifications is that a stay of the order issued by the judge in Sangamon County does not appear imminent. In our communication Sunday, we had anticipated a ruling on the stay sometime Monday, and it was this belief that gave us pause in making a local decision that could be invalidated within just a day or two, causing uncertainty due to ever-changing decisions. However, the inaction from the courts on this matter has actually led to greater uncertainty within schools and classrooms in District 101 and beyond. In the end, no ruling on the stay request simply leads to the conclusion that school districts are to be governed under local control at this time.
2. Additionally, we have learned that the State mandate on masks is *likely* to be modified by the Governor shortly after the Appellate Court ruling, *should* the Temporary Restraining Order be overturned on appeal. The result from either the Appellate Court's ruling or the anticipated action out of the Governor's office will likely affirm local school district control on these important issues.

With this new backdrop, the District 101 Board of Education and Administration have confirmed, through legal counsel, our ability to make local decisions in the interest of our students, staff and families. As such:

- **Starting Thursday, February 10, D101 will move to a mask-optional/mask-recommended environment.**

Teachers at each of our buildings initiated discussions with their students this morning on the mask-optional topic, emphasizing the need to be kind to one another no matter a classmate's mask choice, reassuring that school is - and will remain - a safe place, and answered student questions. Teachers were non-committal on the timing of when this might start, simply noting that it could happen soon. While we are sure that you have already begun having these conversations with your children, we encourage you to spend some additional time with them today/tonight in preparation for tomorrow. Developmentally, we know that children, especially our youngest learners, need appropriate reassurances that they will be following school rules no matter if they are masked or unmasked, that they will remain safe in their classrooms, and that it is okay for other students to make a different choice than theirs. We encourage you to talk with your children as you determine the best decision(s) for your family. Additionally, our staff used the below talking points with students to guide their discussions with students this morning:

- **Reiterate Safety:** Remind students that we are safe in school with or without a mask. Remind them that we wash our hands, practice good hygiene, and stay home when we are sick/not feeling well. Students or staff who test positive for COVID will still quarantine at home.
- **Be Honest:** Explain that the rules changed and that masks are no longer required in school and are now optional.
- **Communicate Empathy:** Each family and teacher can make their own decision based on what they feel most comfortable with at this time. Encourage them to be understanding of others' choices.
- **Being Respectful:** We will continue to be kind to each other. If someone wears a mask that is okay and it is also okay to not wear a mask.

We realize that for some this may feel like a sudden shift in mitigations, but we believe we are equipped to make this change and protect the safety of students and staff. There has been a significant drop in regional, local and District-reported COVID cases over the past two weeks. Additionally, vaccination rates are robust for staff (98%) and community (84.5%) members alike, enhanced HVAC systems are in place in all of our buildings and classrooms, and many [layered mitigations](#) will remain in place.

We will work diligently during this transition and throughout the remainder of the school year to ensure that our schools remain places of safety and security - both physically and emotionally. Please know that teaching and learning will remain the focus in our classrooms. We ask for your partnership in ensuring that our schools remain welcoming and safe environments for all students to learn regardless of personal masking decisions. Thank you in advance for your support in making this transition a positive one for all of our students and staff.

Sincerely,

Caitlin Sendaydiego

Caitlin Sendaydiego
President, Board of Education



Brian Barnhart
Superintendent