



Subject: Changes to Statewide School Mask Requirements

Dear Waitsburg Students and Families,

I am writing to share important information about the mask requirements in our schools.

On February 17, 2022, Governor Jay Inslee announced that the statewide indoor mask requirement for Washington State, including in our K–12 schools, is scheduled to end on March 21, 2022. Once the statewide requirement is lifted, masks will be encouraged in our school buildings, but not required. Masks will still be required on school buses per a federal mandate that requires masks to be worn on all forms of public transportation.

Until March 21, masks will continue to be required for all students, staff, and visitors in all Waitsburg School District buildings. Masks will continue to be provided at school and in classrooms for those who do not have them. Waitsburg School District and our Board of Directors do not have local control over this matter. We are legally required to follow the Governor’s directive, which currently requires masks in school buildings.

Public health modeling indicates that cases and hospitalizations from COVID-19 will continue decreasing over the coming weeks, dropping to rates similar to last summer. The decision to remove the statewide mask requirement was based on the best science and research available, as well as our experience and preparation to continue combatting this virus.

Across the state, school districts have prepared for these changes over the past two years with:

- A COVID-19 vaccination requirement for all school employees,
- Vaccinations for individuals ages 5+ widely available,
- One of the most robust school COVID-19 testing systems in the country,
- Improved ventilation systems, and
- A well-researched understanding of self-mitigation protocols.

Once the statewide mask requirement lifts, without a new requirement from our local health department, masks will become optional in our school buildings.

Students will have the choice to wear a mask at school, with the expectation that others’ choices will be respected. One should not make assumptions regarding someone’s



Waitsburg School District #401 - 100

184 Academy Street, Waitsburg, WA 99361 509-337-6301 www.waitsburgsd.org

beliefs or health status, nor should they comment on them. Our district will not tolerate bullying of any kind for those who choose to continue wearing masks.

For young children, please let teachers know your wishes and they will do their best to reinforce them. Our educators will discuss the change with students in a developmentally appropriate manner, including how to respect others' personal choice. If your child(ren) expresses any anxiety, please feel free to reach out to our school counselors or psychologists for support.

We thank you for your continued flexibility as we navigate this pandemic together. We know you likely have many questions about this announcement, and we are anticipating receiving additional information from public health officials in the coming weeks. We will continue communicating with you as we learn about changes to the guidance for our district.

Sincerely,

Mark Pickel
Superintendent/Elementary Principal