



February 27, 2022

Hello District 161 students, families, and staff,

On Friday, February 25, 2022, the Centers for Disease Control [CDC] updated its COVID-19 school mask guidance to recommend, not mandate, that masks are worn in schools and areas with high transmission rates. Consequently, Governor Pritzker then decided to lift the Illinois statewide mask mandate for schools. Based on those two factors, District 161 will make wearing masks optional beginning tomorrow, Monday, February 28th, 2022.

What does this change mean moving forward?

- Face masks are optional for students and staff in our buildings and on school buses.

What will stay the same?

- Students and staff who want to wear a face mask in school can continue to wear them.
- SHIELD testing will continue as scheduled [may require masking to participate].
- Physical distancing will still be in place.
- COVID-19 positive students and staff will isolate for 5 days, and must wear a mask for 5 days after returning to school.
- Close contacts to a positive case in school may participate in testing to stay or quarantine for 5 days and must wear a mask for 5 days after returning to school.
- Students and staff with COVID-19 symptoms will be assessed by the nurse and may be required to wear a mask while waiting to leave the building.
- Students and staff with COVID-19 symptoms should not enter the building and will be required to show proof of a negative PCR test prior to return.

What do we need from parents and guardians?

- Please have a discussion with your child[ren] to make a decision on their masking status and please make sure they understand your expectations. Staff will not be monitoring for mask compliance during the day.
- We are also asking you to speak with your child about the importance of respecting other peoples' choices when it comes to the masking decision. Harassment or bullying on the basis of another student's choice to wear or not wear a face mask will not be tolerated and will be addressed using the District 161 discipline procedures.

What will happen if COVID-19 cases start rising again?

The Board of Education and administration will continue to monitor the data in our [COVID-19 Dashboard](#). Based on the indicators for our local communities and school district, we will take further prevention steps, to keep students and staff safe.

I expect the mask transition to happen smoothly, based on the care and respect that has been demonstrated in our community since the pandemic began. Next week's community letter will have updated Illinois Department of Public Health guidance, if available, and a recap of the first week of school without mandatory face masks in approximately 2 years.

Sincerely,

Dr. Dana Smith, Superintendent