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March 1, 2022

Dear Maple Run Community –

On the Wednesday before February break, I sent a letter to the Maple Run community explaining how decisions would be made about our masking protocols for our school district. In that letter, I noted that we were waiting for the state of Vermont to verify our vaccination rate at each school. Since then, on Friday, February 25, 2022, the CDC changed their recommendation method. These several community factors are used to guide indoor masking, and include such things as vaccination rates, health care beds, hospital admissions, and the total new number of cases in the county. The CDC has broadened their data to include consideration of the risk of community spread. Using this guidance to consider the best way forward for Maple Run, I am looking at the following data:

- According to the CDC's [COVID-19 Community Level](#) guidance, Franklin County is a medium-risk area which means they do not recommend an indoor mask mandate.
- The Vermont Department of Health and the Agency of Education has recommended that schools with vaccination rates greater than 80% be mask optional. Our vaccination rates from our data are the following: BFA has a vaccination rate of nearly 80%, and our three PreK-8 schools range from 50% to 65% vaccinated.
- Yesterday, the three other Franklin County School Districts/Supervisory Unions decided to be mask optional.
- Themes from a staff survey about changing to mask optional were:
 - Make a decision consistent across the district,
 - Promote a climate that supports the personal decision of the use of masks,
 - Provide high-quality masks for students and staff,
 - Continue to provide access to rapid antigen tests for students and staff.

After careful consideration of this data, beginning March 2, 2022, in all Maple Run schools:

- **Masks will be optional.** Students, families, and staff can make the best decision for themselves.
- The schools will provide high-quality masks and antigen test kits for all students and staff.
- If the community level increases or we see a significant change in our case count at our schools, we will update our masking requirements to align with the CDC's high level of risk.

- Across the entire system, community members should feel comfortable wearing masks based on their personal choice and their family's risk level. People who have compromised immune systems, or a family member with a compromised immune system, are fully supported to wear a high-quality mask.
- If a student or staff member has symptoms, a positive test, or exposure to a family member with COVID, they should stay home.

This change will cause high anxiety for some community members, which is understandable. I want to assure everyone that Maple Run will continue our increased hygiene and cleaning protocols, provide access to testing, and encourage everyone to stay home when sick. I am confident that our schools will remain a safe and healthy environment for everyone. To support students who choose to wear a mask, the staff will be on guard for peer pressure and will proactively support each student in the choice they make for themselves. We all want an environment that is safe for each community member to make personal choices for themselves.

I am excited to share this news with all of you, and I am hopeful our students will have a more "normal" spring. COVID is moving from a pandemic to an endemic, and our practices will require a shift to personal responsibility for our community's overall health and safety. I am confident we can make this transition and be empathetic about everyone's decision by working together.

Thank you for your continued support for our schools and for helping to keep our community safe by staying home when sick.

Sincerely,



Bill Kimball

Superintendent of Schools