



DWIGHT PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Return to School 2021 – 2022

****ALL SUBJECT TO CHANGE AS ISBE/CDC/ADPH GUIDANCE CHANGES****

FAQs REGARDING ILLINOIS' MASK MANDATE FOR SCHOOLS

We appreciate and understand the concerns and questions many have regarding the recent mask mandate set forth by Governor Pritzker. It is our responsibility to make the safety of our students a top priority. The Dwight Public School system follows numerous requirements and guidelines from various state agencies. We regularly consult with our legal counsel and insurers regarding our rights and obligations on these issues.

Although everyone is not always in agreement with those policies, the District's obligation is to operate in compliance with all legal and safety requirements. Our goal remains to provide a quality education for the students of the Dwight Public School Districts #232 & #230 and to provide a safe learning environment for our students and staff. With these principles in mind, below are some FAQs we have put together to address some of the concerns we have heard regarding the mask mandate.

What is the current rule for masks in Illinois Schools?

On August 4, 2021, Governor J.B. Pritzker issued an Executive Order (EO 2021-18) mandating masks be worn in all Pre-Kindergarten through grade 12 public and nonpublic schools effective immediately. The Executive Order requires the indoor use of face coverings by students, staff and visitors who are over the age of two and able to medically tolerate a face covering, regardless of vaccination status.

Is the Executive Order for masks in Schools a requirement or recommendation?

The Executive Order is a requirement. All individuals must wear a mask in schools in accordance with the Order.

Can the School Districts still decide to adopt a mask optional policy?

No. The District must follow the Executive Order and require all staff, students and visitors to wear masks while indoors at school. Unlike the CDC recommendations announced in July, the Executive Order does not allow individual districts to make decisions about masks that deviate from the requirements of the Executive Order.



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Does the Governor have authority to impose this mask mandate?

Yes. In 2020, lawsuits were brought against the Governor challenging his authority to issue disaster proclamations and Executive Orders with public health mandates. The Illinois Appellate Court (2nd District) and the Sangamon County Circuit Court upheld the Governor's orders and ruled that he has the authority to issue such proclamations and Executive Orders under the Illinois Emergency Management Agency Act and the Illinois Constitution.

Who will make the decisions on whether students can stay in school or be sent home to quarantine based on symptoms or close contacts?

The School Nurse is in close contact with building administrators and the Livingston County Health Department. She will communicate with students, parents and staff regarding policies and procedures regarding COVID-19. Ultimately, the school nurse, in conjunction with school administrators and current health department guidance, will make the final decisions on the status of students who can stay; the students who must be sent home to quarantine; and for how long. Decisions to test and/or quarantine students will be based on the student's symptoms and circumstances surrounding potential exposure/illness.

What if my student refuses to wear a mask?

The District will supply a mask to any student who does not have a mask. If a student refuses to wear a mask, they will be isolated from other students; parents will be contacted and then the student will be sent home. We are hopeful that we will not have to do this and ask for parent / guardian support.

Is the mask mandate permanent?

Not necessarily. In his speech, the Governor cited current circumstances such as substantial to high community transmission of COVID-19, the Delta variant and its high transmission rate, relatively low vaccination rates for school students, and the fact that school students under age 12 are not yet eligible for the vaccine. As circumstances change, it is possible that the mask requirement will change.

Why don't the School Districts just ignore the mask mandate or not enforce it?

The Governor noted that he will enforce the mandate as needed and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) has the authority to change the Districts' recognition status, which could result in a loss of state funding. To put this into perspective, the Dwight Common School District currently receives more than \$1,100,000 in state funding and Dwight Township High School District receives more than \$700,000 in state funding. ISBE has previously initiated



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such action against a district for relaxing mask requirements lower than what the state required. In addition, failure to follow a required safety measure such as this mask mandate exposes the District to liability, loss of tort immunity protections, and loss of insurance coverages. School insurance carriers consider the safety requirements to be minimum standards that must be met and the only reasonable alternative for districts.

Can my student choose to be educated at home until the mask mandate is over?

All students will be required to be in-person. Choosing full-time Remote Learning IS NOT an option for 2021-2022.

Remote Learning may only be offered to those students with documented health exceptions but those will likely be very rare. Administration will provide more information to qualifying families and will have final discretion on those eligible.

In the event a student is quarantined due to COVID, teachers will provide work to be completed as in a traditional absence according to the school handbook policy.

What are my options if I refuse to send my student to school with a mask?

At this point, unless your student qualifies for Remote Learning based on ISBE guidance, your only option is Home Schooling your student(s). Information about Home Schooling can be obtained from the Regional Office of Education #17 at 309-888-5120.

Are there any benefits to following the mask mandate?

In addition to minimizing liability exposure, preserving tort immunities, and protecting available insurance coverages, the use of masks by everyone helps the District to maintain full in-person instruction. We can have less physical distancing and can take advantage of exceptions to quarantine requirements that only apply if everyone is wearing a mask. This will result in less disruptions to our students and more continuity in their education.

Per USDA Guidelines: the Safe Return Plan must discuss how the district will do the following.

-Regularly, but no less frequently than every six months (taking into consideration the timing of significant changes to CDC guidance on reopening schools), review and, as appropriate, revise its plan for the safe return to in-person instruction and continuity of services.

-Seek and take public input into account in determining whether and what revisions are necessary.



What COVID-19 PROTOCOLS will still be in place for the daily school day?

- **MASKS:** The Executive Order requires the indoor use of face coverings by students, staff and visitors who are over the age of two and able to medically tolerate a face covering, regardless of vaccination status.
- **MASKS** are also required to be worn on buses by students, drivers, and staff.
- **Students that refuse to wear masks will be sent home for the remainder of the day.**
- Social distancing protocols will be maintained while school is in session.
- Hand washing and hand sanitizing will be frequent.
- We will continue to implement best practices and safety protocols in line with current guidelines from the IDPH/CDC.
- Parents will not be able to walk students to classrooms; staff members will be available to help walk students to classrooms on the first day of school.

How/when will we implement MASK BREAKS?

- Mask breaks will continue to be built into classroom schedules (i.e. morning, lunch, afternoon) and additionally as teachers see the need.

What will ATTENDANCE procedures look like?

- **Self-Certification cards will no longer be required.** If a parent/guardian sends a child to school, it will be assumed that the child is not exhibiting any COVID-19 symptoms.
- Please do not send students to school that are displaying any symptoms.
- If students are deemed symptomatic once at school, current guidelines from the IDPH will be followed.
- **ONLY SYMPTOMATIC STUDENTS WILL BE SENT HOME. SIBLINGS/HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS WILL STAY AT SCHOOL.**

What happens when your child is CALLED IN ABSENT because they are not feeling well?

- Parents/guardians will need to call the school prior to 9AM to report any absences.
- Students should be symptom free for 24 hours before they return to school after any illness related absence.
- COVID-like symptoms or questions should be emailed to gscovid@dwightk12.org or call the school nurse at 584-6224. The need for COVID testing or exclusions can be discussed with the school nurse.

What happens when someone is COVID POSITIVE?

- **Students and staff that become COVID Positive will be quarantined according to IDPH guidelines.**
- **Parents/Guardians should have back-up emergency contacts so that symptomatic students are picked-up in a timely manner.**
- Students that present with COVID symptoms (per IDPH guidance) will be moved to the main entrance waiting area to be picked up.



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- Students will not sit in the nurse's office with symptoms.
- Contact tracing will occur and students and/or staff deemed as close contacts will be sent home.
- If your child is placed in quarantine, teachers will provide work to be completed.
- In these cases, the expectation is that absent work will be completed in the manner of a traditional absence according to the school handbook policy.
- Substitutes will be utilized and/or teaching teams in the event a teacher is positive.
- Schools may need to shut down for 3-5 days for cleaning as directed by the IDPH.
- Schools may need to move to full remote learning/e-Learning as rates increase.

Who is considered a CLOSE CONTACT?

- ALL students and staff properly wearing masks WILL NOT be considered close contacts.
- VACCINATED students and staff WILL NOT be quarantined if exposed to a COVID positive person unless they develop symptoms.
- VACCINATED students and staff WILL NOT be considered a close contact if they are exposed during lunch.
- Unvaccinated students and staff WILL BE considered a close contact if they are exposed during lunch.

What about CLASSROOMS & SOCIAL DISTANCING?

- Desks/Classroom seating may be shared and students may be seated in groups/pods. Groups/pods will be similar and/or "mirrored" when possible as students move classrooms to help reduce the number of close contacts students have each day.
- Desks/Classroom shared seating will be wiped down by students or staff in-between usage.
- Desks/Classroom seating will be cleaned and sanitized each night.
- Extra furniture will be removed from classrooms to maximize space for desks.
- Students will move throughout the buildings for library, PE, junior high/high school classes, etc.
- Art will take place in the Art Room for 2nd-8th grade and classrooms for K-1st.
- Music/Band will be held in the Music Room, Band Room, and/or outside as needed.

What will BUS TRANSPORTATION look like?

- **MASKS will be required at all times for students, all staff, and drivers while on school buses for any function to and from school per ISBE guidance.**
- Siblings will sit together.
- Buses will be cleaned after each route.
- Parents SHOULD NOT leave students at bus stops alone.

What will MEALS (BREAKFAST & LUNCH) look like?

- **BREAKFAST WILL NOT BE SERVED AT SCHOOL.**
- Breakfasts for the following week will be sent home with students on Fridays.
- Lunch will be served in classrooms, the cafeteria, and the gym on an alternating schedule.



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What about LOCKERS, LOCKER ROOMS, and BACKPACKS?

- Lockers will be used by students.
- Students will use the locker room to change for PE.
- Students may use their own backpacks.
- Students will hang backpacks on coat hooks with coats.

What about RESTROOMS/WATER FOUNTAINS?

- Restrooms will be identified for different groups of students to limit the amount of interaction between different groups of students.
- Students will be monitored when using the restroom.
- Water fountains will be used to refill water bottles only.
- Additional protocols will be put in place for cleaning restrooms and water fountains.

What will BUILDING ACCESS look like?

- Building access will be limited to parents/guardians/and or visitors.
- Masks and social distancing will be required for in-person meetings and/or volunteer situations.
- Parents/Guardians coming to the school to pick-up sick children will be met at the Main Door.

What will EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES look like?

- OUTDOOR extra-curricular activities WILL NOT require masks.
- INDOOR extra-curricular activities WILL require masks.