

Weston Public Schools



Lisa R. Wolak
lisawolak@westonps.org

Superintendent of Schools
24 School Road
Weston, Connecticut 06883

Telephone: (203) 221-6550
Fax: (203) 221-1253

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Dear Families:

I am writing to update you on the status of mask mandates affecting our schools. At the Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, February 15, I shared my recommendation that the Weston Public Schools eliminate the universal mask mandate for all students and staff in our schools beginning Monday, February 28, 2022. As a result, I recommended that the Board of Education (BOE) repeal Policy 5132.1 (Use of Face Coverings). My recommendations are contingent on the Commissioner of Education eliminating the statewide mask mandate in schools effective February 28, 2022.

Masks Optional in Schools Effective February 28

At the February 15 meeting, The BOE repealed Policy 5132.1 and implemented regulations regarding face masks to be effective upon the repeal of the statewide mask mandate in schools by the Commissioners of Education and Early Childhood. The BOE approved [Policy 5132.2](#) concerning the health and safety protocols related to COVID-19. **Therefore, starting Monday, February 28, 2022, all students (Pre-K- through grade 12) and staff will not be required to wear a mask in school.**

In preparation for February 28, the district has received another supply of testing kits from the state. We will distribute these kits to all students and staff by Friday, February 25. As a proactive measure, we recommend that all members of our school community test themselves prior to leaving for school on Monday, February 28 for the most timely and accurate results. We are in the process of reviewing other COVID-19 mitigation practices, such as visitor limitations, and we expect to update families in early March. Please note that the district will permit our K-5 parents to have the option for an in person conference this spring.

Masks Required on School Buses

It is important to note that [federal law](#) continues to require that students and staff wear masks when traveling on school buses to and from school and to and from school sponsored events, including athletics and field trips. The district will update families if there is any change in the federal law requiring students and staff to wear masks on school buses.

Change in State Law Requiring Universal Mask Wearing in Schools

The change in Weston is the result of statewide legal changes. As many of you are aware, our state legislature recently passed, and Governor Lamont signed into law, Special Act 22-1. The new law provides the Commissioners of Education and Early Childhood, in consultation with the Commissioner of Public Health, to issue binding guidance and rules for the operation of schools in response to the pandemic through June 30, 2022. Special Act 22-1 also permits such Commissioners to rescind the statewide mask requirement in schools, with such action taking effect not earlier than February 28, 2022. The Connecticut State Department of

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Education (CSDE), in consultation with the Department of Public Health (DPH), has indicated its intent to eliminate the universal mask mandate for all Connecticut schools, effective February 28. The [Connecticut Office of Early Childhood](#) will no longer mandate mask wearing effective February 28 as well. It should be noted that, although the OEC continues to recommend masking wearing for preschoolers based on the fact children under the age of 5 cannot be vaccinated, it is no longer a mandate. The elimination of the universal mask mandate on a statewide level is based on a number of public health factors, including the decrease in the rates of infection and high rates of vaccination. Similarly, infection rates have dropped in our schools and community, and the Weston community has a high vaccination rate. Its citizens have worked hard to keep the community safe for almost two years.

Recommendations of CSDE and DPH

As part of the transition to local decision-making regarding COVID-19 mitigation strategies, CSDE and DPH recently published COVID-19 mitigation guidance for school communities. We would like to provide you with a summary of the recommended COVID-19 mitigation strategies that our schools will continue to implement.

Briefly, the [DPH guidance](#) is designed to transition our schools to routine respiratory disease prevention and management. Our district will continue to follow the following prevention and management strategies:

- Recommending [COVID-19 vaccination](#) for all eligible students and staff;
- Following [isolation guidelines](#) for students and staff who have symptoms associated with or have tested positive for, COVID-19;
- Supporting students and staff who choose to [wear a mask](#);
- Recommending COVID-19 prevention strategies including testing and masking for students following illness or exposures to COVID-19 cases;
- Advising parents to report all cases of COVID-19 to the school nurse;
- Updating the district [COVID dashboard](#) and providing timely information to parents;
- Distributing testing kits to all students and staff by February 25 and continuing to make kits and masks available in school; and
- Offering voluntary weekly testing to all students regardless of vaccination status. Parents may register their children at any time via the [parent portal](#).

In the event of an increase in the infection rates or other signs of possible surges in the community, the district will work with the local public health officials and the district's medical advisor to implement any needed strategies including circumstances in which all individuals entering a school and/or Board facility may be required to wear an appropriate face covering. ([Policy 5132.2](#))

Considerations for the Weston School Community

The district administration and school COVID-19 Liaisons will continue to meet weekly working with its medical advisors and local public health officials to (i) monitor the rates of COVID-19 infection and COVID-19 vaccination, and (ii) consult on any needed changes in mitigation strategies. A review of the district's current considerations, which are aligned with [CDPH considerations](#), is set forth below.

- Periodic review and consideration of data points from all available resources
WPS will continue to monitor data metrics including the number of positive cases and cases quarantined due to exposure amongst students and staff. WPS will review vaccination rates and positive cases in the community with the local public health officials on an ongoing basis.
- Balance of risk of increases in infection, quarantine and isolation
- In consultation with the local public health officials, WPS will assess the appropriateness of different masking policies in specific schools depending upon the percentage of vaccinated students and other

metrics including the number of positive cases and extent of transmission. If warranted, a temporary masking policy may be implemented. ([Policy 5132.2](#))

- Current COVID-19 vaccination status of students and staff

Vaccination status will be reviewed. Information can be found on this [link](#). WPS will continue to provide vaccination clinics when offered by Griffin Hospital.

- Additional planning to address the needs of students and staff who may be at a greater risk for adverse health outcomes

Families of medically fragile or immunocompromised students who are at risk for severe outcomes if they become infected with COVID-19 P should first contact their school's assistant principal who serves as the COVID-19 liaison administrator. Any student requesting support or accommodation under Section 504, IDEA or ADA should contact the COVID-19 liaison administrator.

Hurlbutt Elementary School	matthewpaylor@westonps.org
Weston Intermediate School	nicolewilhelm@westonps.org
Weston Middle School	druwalters@westonps.org
Weston High School	matthewfilip@westonps.org

- Assistance to provide students and staff making personal decisions regarding mask wearing

The adults in our schools know that there will be students and colleagues who choose to continue to wear masks. Our school administrators, in collaboration with our counselors and mental health support staff, are working with all staff to ensure a smooth transition. Fortunately, our schools have structures in place to facilitate this process including morning meetings, class charters written by our students, and school rules. Staff is ready to support all students collectively and individually as needed. However, staff is not in a position to track and enforce the individual choice of students wearing masks during the school day. Parents who wish their children to remain masked should discuss this as a family. Staff will enforce the wearing of masks for all students on school buses.

- Processes needed to be in place for continuous assessment and decision-making regarding COVID-19 policies and mitigation strategies going forward

We are committed to monitoring the status of COVID-19 in our community and will consult with the local health officials to determine if we need to deploy outbreak control measures including modifications to masking.

As we move forward as a school community, it is important that individual choice to mask or unmask is honored and respected. Students are expected to adhere to our school rules that promote a safe, positive climate for all students. Our schools will not tolerate any inappropriate behavior including mean-spirited comments and intrusive questions about vaccination status. If you have any questions please contact the COVID-19 liaison administrators listed above. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,



Lisa Wolak
Superintendent of Schools