

ROCKVILLE CENTRE UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Dear Parents and Staff,

The events of the past 24 hours have been a cause of concern for many members of our community. Please understand that we are trying to follow all legal advice while maintaining the safest environment for all of our students and staff. The decision last night to make masks optional was based on the fact that the New York State Supreme Court of Nassau County had declared the Governor's mask mandate illegal. While the New York State Education Department (NYSED) had come out with a statement that said schools should follow the mask rule, our attorneys had indicated that the NYSED had no authority to overrule a Nassau County judge and that the mask regulation could not be enforced until there was an appeal and a stay order. Based on this information, and not knowing when the appeal would be filed or a stay might be issued, the mask optional message was sent out last night.

Further advice from the School District's attorney provided yesterday, and confirmed again this morning, indicated that an automatic stay would be issued once an appeal is filed. Early this morning we received confirmation that an appeal had been filed by the Attorney General's Office. Expecting the automatic stay, which would again require masking, and not wanting to disrupt current masking protocols, we issued the revised masking required message this morning.

As many of you know, the automatic stay was not implemented. There are continuing legal proceedings regarding this case today, the results of which may be forthcoming, but there has been no further direction at this time regarding the stay order. The continuing twists and turns of the legal system surrounding masking have proven difficult to follow consistently, but we are trying to do our best to navigate. This was another reason we moved back to masks this morning as we did not want to change protocols if there was going to be an imminent change in the laws and/or regulations. We understand parental concerns over masking options but also over maintaining a safe and healthy environment. Clearly, not everyone will be satisfied with any particular decision but I ask that you please bear with us as we address these legal changes as they come up. We continue to plan to follow the law.

For tomorrow, Wednesday, we will move forward with two possible plans of action, depending on what transpires prior to the opening of school tomorrow. If an appropriate stay order has not yet been issued as of the opening of school tomorrow, masking will be optional for students and staff. Should a stay order be issued which requires schools to continue masking, prior to the opening of school tomorrow, masking will continue to be required. If the appropriate stay order is granted, we will communicate that to you prior to the start of school. Students and staff should be prepared to come to school tomorrow wearing masks since there is the possibility of an appropriate stay order being issued overnight. Any student or staff member returning from a quarantine/isolation after 5 days must continue to wear a well-fitting mask for 5 days regardless of whether or not masks become optional. It is important to note that all other mitigation strategies will remain in place including increased ventilation, open windows and physical distancing.

Thank you all for your understanding and working with us during these trying times.

Robert A. Bartels, Interim Superintendent