

ROCKVILLE CENTRE UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Dear Community Members and Staff,

The New York State mask mandate put in place by Governor Hochul for schools will continue to run through February 21st and the Governor has stated that she will wait until after the February break to make a decision on extending the mask mandate for schools. The temporary stay to keep the mask mandate in place from the appeal of the New York State Supreme Court of Nassau County decision runs through March 2nd when the proceedings continue and the stay may be extended again or lifted. The Governor continues to refuse to provide any metrics on which she is basing her decision. This has left school districts in the dark as far as planning for when this mandate may be lifted. Community members in this and all school districts are at odds with one another over this mandate. The lack of metrics or timely notification only adds to the confusion. The School Boards and Superintendents Associations have continued to lobby for a timeline and specific guidance in advance of a decision to lift the mask mandate to allow schools to plan appropriately for any changes in guidelines.

As discussed at our Board of Education meeting last week, the following plan of action will be put in place once the mask mandate is lifted for school districts. It is important to note that this plan is based on an assumption that no other guidelines will change when the mandate is lifted:

1. The District will continue to follow our reopening plan where masks are required under the state mask mandate, so when the mandate is lifted, masks will become optional for students and staff. Students and staff may continue to wear the masks if they so choose. There are some exceptions to the masks being optional. Due to Federal Transportation Law, masks will still be required for ALL students/staff riding a bus. These students/staff will have the option of removing the masks at school, but they must be worn while riding the bus. In addition, all students/staff returning from quarantine after 5 days will be required to wear a mask for the remaining 5 days of their quarantine period.
2. All current social distancing efforts will remain in place. Students will continue to eat lunch spaced apart and not at crowded cafeteria tables. Teachers will refrain from pulling all students onto a small carpet for a reading or other close contact activity.
3. All staff will be vigilant in watching for any student exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms or not acting normally where they may have a headache or fever. Those students will be reported to the nurse and will be sent home if determined to be sick with COVID-19 symptoms.
4. Students will be informed that masking is a choice and they need to be considerate of their classmates. There is to be no bullying or singling out of any kind of students who choose to wear

masks or not to wear masks. In addition, there will be no bullying or singling out of any students who have been, or who have not been, vaccinated. Students engaging in any such bullying will be disciplined appropriately.

5. Students will be advised that there are certain staff members they can go and talk to if they have concerns or worries about wearing a mask or not, or being vaccinated or not, or if any other students are making them feel uncomfortable about their own personal choices.
6. If there is a student within 6 feet of another student for more than 15 minutes who tests COVID-19 positive, that student would be subject to quarantine if they are not vaccinated and not wearing a mask.
7. There will NOT be a remote option for students who do not want to come to school because of a mask optional policy. The only remote instruction we will have is for quarantine support for those students who are quarantined or isolating due to COVID-19 protocols.
8. Lastly, there may be other caveats or restrictions imposed by the Governor if and when the mandate is lifted so we need to be cognizant that this plan of action may need further modification if that occurs.

I know this change will be welcome for some and worrisome for others. Our faculty and staff are prepared to manage the emotions and anxiety that this transition is likely to initiate. Be assured that all of our other mitigation practices will remain in place. Our expectation is that the school community will respect each other's choices. We must work together to build a school culture that respects the decisions made by others as it applies to these circumstances. I encourage everyone in the community to stand together so that our students can experience a healthy and happy learning environment for the rest of the school year.

There are home test kits available at each school building. We encourage all parents to pick up test kits before the Winter break next week and use them to check your children before they return to school after the break. You may pick them up from the security guard at the main entrances of each school after school has started and until school is dismissed for the day so as to avoid conflicts with arrival and dismissal procedures. Test kits will not be sent home with students.

As additional information regarding the mandates is released, we will communicate it with you promptly.

Sincerely,

Robert A. Bartels
Interim Superintendent

Board of Education