

Revised Policy as a result of recent legislative changes.

Students

Face Masks/Coverings

This policy pertains to students, faculty, staff, and visitors. It has been developed to fulfill the guiding principles contained in the *Framework for Connecticut Schools*, specifically to safeguard the health and safety of students and staff and to allow all students the opportunity to return into classrooms full time. Evidence shows that the proper wearing of facial masks or coverings helps stop the spread of the virus, which is currently by droplets when an individual coughs, sneezes or talks.

The Board of Education (Board) is implementing this masking requirement to promote the safest possible learning, teaching and work environment for students, faculty, staff and visitors during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first priority of the Board is the health and well-being of students and staff as the District prepares for and implements the safe reopening of schools.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Connecticut Department of Health (DPH) and the Connecticut State Department of Education, as outlined in *Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together* requires the wearing of face coverings for all students and staff when they are inside school buildings and while riding school transportation vehicles, with certain exceptions.

Definitions

Face covering/mask – a cloth, paper, or disposable face covering that covers the nose and mouth. It may or may not be medical grade. **(Evidence shows that the proper wearing of facial masks or coverings helps stop the spread of the virus, which is currently by droplets when an individual coughs, sneezes or talks.)**

Face shield – a clear, plastic shield that covers the forehead, extends below the chin and wraps around the sides of the face, protecting the eyes, nose and mouth from contamination from respiratory droplets, along with masks or respirators.

Clear plastic barrier – a clear plastic or solid surface that can be cleaned and sanitized often.

Transportation

Student passengers are required to wear a face mask or cloth face covering that completely covers the nose and mouth during transit. The student's face covering must be in place prior to boarding the bus, van or other vehicles and must be kept in place until they are completely off the bus or van. The Board shall provide back-up masks if students do not have face coverings when boarding a school bus or van. The face mask or cloth face covering is also applicable to the drivers of the vehicle.

The Board may consider the option of assigning a temporary monitor on student transportation at the beginning of the school year to facilitate compliance with this new face mask protocol.

Students

Face Masks/Coverings (continued)

School Buildings and Grounds

All students are required to use face coverings that completely covers the nose and mouth, when they are inside the school building or on school grounds, even when social distancing is maintained. An individual shall be excused from this requirement for the following listed reasons, per CDC guidance.

The individual:

1. has trouble breathing;
2. is unconscious;
3. is incapacitated; or
4. cannot remove the mask or face covering without assistance.

In addition, masks or face coverings shall not be required for anyone who has a medical reason making it unsafe to wear a face mask or face covering. A written notification from a **licensed medical provider, the Department of Developmental Services or other state agency that provides or supports services for people with emotional, intellectual or physical disabilities, or a person authorized by any such agency** physician is required in order for the Board to permit a medical exemption. **Such documentation need not name or describe the condition that qualifies the person for the exemption. Schools shall also consider if supporting documentation exists in a student's existing school medical record, where the medical condition and/or need for an exemption is obvious, thereby eliminating the need for additional documentation previously described.** ~~The note should state the medical reason for the requested exemption, such as, but not limited to, difficulty breathing.~~

The Board supports the position of the SDE that an exemption “has possible serious consequences for the health of other students and their families, and for the school’s ability to stay open in the face of community spread, medical professionals should give serious consideration to the risk-benefit of giving medical notes for mask exemptions and discuss these considerations with the requesting families, including the possibility that a medical attestation of compromised health severe enough to present a contraindication to mask wearing may also constitute a directive for fully-virtual learning.”

The State Department of Education (SDE) has proclaimed that the need for a medical exemption for the wearing of masks “is rare.” The SDE has stated that “medical contraindications” to the wearing of masks “are generally limited to individuals suffering from severe chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) such as might be seen with cystic fibrosis, severe emphysema, heart failure or significant facial burns that would cause extreme pain or interfere with the healing of a skin graft.” The SDE has indicated that these “severe medical conditions will be rare in students or staff capable of presenting to the school for work or instruction”, as these “individuals would not be able to move about freely without significant assistance.” It is recommended by the SDE “for anyone suffering from any of these underlying conditions for that person to remain at home and engage in fully virtual learning due to their risk of developing severe complications if they did become infected with COVID-19.”

Students

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School Buildings and Grounds (continued)

The Board supports the SDE position that “mild or intermittent respiratory or other common conditions such as asthma, cardiovascular diseases, kidney disease, or other similar conditions are generally not considered contraindications to the wearing of loose-fitting face coverings.” However, it is recognized that while certain “mild’ medical conditions will not justify the exemption from mask wearing, some students may have difficulty breathing through a mask creating a significant health risk or if psychological responses to a mask, such as claustrophobia, cannot be accommodated by trying different mask types, then the mask could be considered contraindicated.

The Board recognizes that apart from the medical contraindications other situations may exist where exemptions to mask wearing shall be considered. Some students with developmental disabilities may not tolerate or be able to comply well with mask wearing, but this alone should not be a basis for their exclusion from school. The District shall assess, on an individualized basis, the appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities who are unable to wear a face mask. An exemption to mask wearing may be appropriate for children with special needs, such as hearing or language challenges, autism, or developmental disabilities if they have issues tolerating a face covering.

In addition, the Board recognizes that some students and staff involved with certain special education activities, such as, but not limited to, speech therapy or where lip reading is required, may need to be exempted from wearing a mask intermittently. In such situations in which an exception is requested based upon a disability, a Planning and Placement Team (PPT) or Section 504 meeting, “as appropriate, shall be held in order to consider programming revisions or appropriate accommodations. In those situations where masks will not be in use, other key mitigation strategies shall be used, including maximizing distancing, holding activities outdoors or to a well-ventilated space, and/or the use of face shields or other physical barriers.

Parents/guardians may not excuse their child from this face mask requirement, by signing a waiver, because such wearing is a mandated requirement that the Office of the Governor, the Connecticut State Department of Education, and/or the Connecticut State Department of Public Health have defined as necessary for school districts to comply with in order to open schools from the COVID-19 caused closure.

In addition to the wearing of face masks, the District will maximize social distancing between student’s workstations and desks, achieving six feet when feasible. Space between the teacher and students is to be maximized to reduce the risk of increased droplets from teachers during instruction. A teacher is permitted to remove a face covering or mask during instruction. If the teacher removes the face covering or mask during instruction, spacing shall be increased beyond six feet; a teacher who remains seated during instruction is required to ~~take the additional step to use a physical barrier~~ **use Plexiglas or other physical barrier in place, which is preferable to the use of a face shield.**

Students

Face Masks/Coverings

School Buildings and Grounds (continued)

The Board acknowledges the position of the SDE that teachers should still wear a face covering/mask at all times in school “except for in the rare circumstances where face covering is detrimental to the specific instruction being given.”

Transparent (clear) masks should be considered as an option for teachers and students in classes for deaf and hard of hearing students. Pre-K and special education teachers should consider wearing clear masks.

Face shields may be an option for those students with medical, behavioral or other challenges who are unable to wear face masks or coverings. The Board recognizes that face shields are not as effective for source control and should be used only when other methods are not available or appropriate. Therefore, the use of face shields for those with medical conditions is done with the understanding of their limitations and a heightened need for strict adherence to social distancing. **Face shields, however, are not an acceptable substitute for face covering masks.**

The Board shall provide to any student a face mask if such individual does not have one. Training shall be provided as necessary regarding the proper use of face coverings. Information shall be provided to students and students’ families regarding the proper use, removal and washing of cloth face coverings.

Limited Exceptions to Use of Face Coverings

When other and appropriate mitigating practices are in place, such as social distancing, students will not be required to wear face masks or coverings while eating, drinking, during physical education classes, or when students are outside and effectively practicing social distancing and any other possible mitigants. Exceptions may also be necessary for certain special education students or other special populations.

Teachers and staff may be excused from wearing a face mask or covering while teaching provided they are properly socially distancing or remaining static behind a physical barrier. Face shields may be useful in situations where it is important for students to see how a teacher pronounces words (e.g. English Learners, early childhood, foreign language, etc.) and social distancing is maintained. However, face shields alone are not a sufficient alternate to the wearing of face mask for source control.

The SDE has indicated that “when the wearing of a face mask is problematic, (i.e. when the teacher’s and student’s mouth must be visible during speech therapy, when a child with hearing loss needs to read lips, etc.) other appropriate control measures should be implemented, including proper social distancing and/or the use of physical barriers between students and staff.”

Students

Face Masks/Coverings

Mask Breaks

Breaks from wearing masks shall be scheduled throughout the school day, by the teacher, provided that strict social distancing requirements are maintained and limitations are enforced regarding student and staff mobility.

Priority shall be placed for mask breaks to be outdoors if possible, or indoors in large areas where students can appropriately distance. With respect to indoor breaks, which should occur in well-ventilated areas, students and/or staff shall maintain a distance of six feet or more apart and have no physical contact. It is recommended that everyone face in the same direction. Loud talking, yelling/bellowing or singing must be avoided during mask breaks.

During time of eating, face masks or coverings may be removed. Masks are required in all dining areas while entering and leaving or getting food and drinks. They may be removed at appropriately socially distanced tables in order to eat but must be replaced after eating.

A recess period may be used as a break from wearing masks when no more than one class is outside at a time and social distancing requirements are maintained to the greatest degree feasible.

Violations of this Policy

Violations of this policy, whether by students or staff, shall be handled in the same manner as other violations of applicable Board policy. **Prior to the imposition of disciplinary measures, staff is encouraged to remind students of the significant health implications of this decision and work with the student to correct and encourage cooperation. Staff is encouraged to pursue a broad spectrum of non-exclusionary options to support students prior to pursuing discipline.**

If a student refuses to wear a face mask or covering and does not fulfill any of the exemptions allowed by this policy, such student shall be sent to **a room or space designed by the school.** ~~the school's isolation room.~~ The parent/guardian shall be contacted to rectify the situation, school personnel to explain the options available regarding schooling and for the possible removal of the child from the school setting.

If a visitor refuses to wear a face covering, for non-medical reasons, entry to the school/district facility may be denied.

Teachers or schools may provide incentives for compliance with the face mask requirement.

Students

Face Masks/Coverings

Community Outreach

The District shall engage in community education programs including signage, mass and targeted communication, and positive reinforcement that will actively promote mask use consistent with CDC, DDH, CSDE and OSHA guidance. Community members will be reminded that mask use does not replace the need for social distancing, washing of hands and other preventative practices recommended by all appropriate authorities.

Other Considerations

- The District shall maintain in each school a supply of disposable face coverings in the event that a student or visitor does not have one for use.
- Special attention must be given to putting on and removing face coverings for purposes such as eating. After use, the front of the face covering is considered contaminated and should not be touched during removal or replacement. Hand hygiene should be performed immediately after removing and after replacing the face covering.
- When medically appropriate, nurses shall substitute use of metered dose inhalers and spacers for students with respiratory issues.
- Face shields with face masks may be used by staff who support students with special healthcare needs such as those who are unable to wear masks and who may need assistance with activities of daily living, such as toileting and eating.
- Mask use will not be required by employees when they are alone in private offices. However, they are required to mask when anyone enters a private office space and required to wear a mask if their office space is physically shared with others and does not allow for 6 feet of physical distancing or if the work area is frequented by others (such as a reception area).
- **CDC does not recommend masks with exhalation valves for use in the school setting.**

Until further notice the Board will require the wearing of masks as prescribed in this policy. The Board reserves the right to interpret the provisions of this policy and to modify any or all matters contained in this policy at any time, subject to applicable law.

(cf. 5141.22 – Communicable/Infectious Diseases)

(cf. 5141.6 – Crisis Management Plan)

(cf. 6114 – Emergencies and Disaster Preparedness)

(cf. 6114.6 – Emergency Closings)

(cf. 6114.8 – Pandemic/Epidemic Emergencies)

(cf. 6114.81 – Emergency Suspension of Policy During Pandemic)

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes
10-154a Professional communications between teacher or nurse and student.

Students

Face Masks/Coverings (continued)

Legal Reference: (continued)

10-207 Duties of medical advisors.

10-221 Boards of education to prescribe rules.

19a-221 Quarantine of certain persons.

52-557b Immunity from liability for emergency medical assistance, first aid or medication by injection. School personnel not required to administer or render.

CT Executive Order 7NNN, August 14, 2020

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, (FERPA), 20 U.S.C. 1232g, 45 C.F.R. 99.

Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together

Connecticut LEA School Reopening Template

Addendum 11-Interim Guidance for the Use of Face coverings in Schools during COVID-19, August 31, 2020, SDE.

“Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Reopening K-12 Public Schools” series, Vol. 3, September 2, 2020, SDE.

CDC Considerations for Schools

CDC Symptoms of Coronavirus

CDC Quarantine & Isolation

CDC Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19

CDC Interim Guidance for Administrators of US K-12 Schools and Child Care Programs

CDC Schools Decision Tree for Schools Reopening

Policy adopted: September 21, 2020, Revised