

March 2, 2022

Dear Wayne Schools Community Members;

Monday, March 7th, is an important day for our pandemic recovery. Starting on Monday, our schools will become "mask optional" which means students and staff will no longer need to wear masks in school or on school buses. However, any student or staff member who wishes to wear a mask may do so at any time.

There are some important details that we must also share in advance of March 7th. While masks will become optional, we will not be 100% mask free. A handful of New Jersey Department of Health requirements remains in place to address a limited number of situations when students and staff may need to wear masks.

One situation where it may be necessary to wear masks includes visits to the nurse's office. School nurses have the right to ask students or staff to wear masks, primarily when visitors are exhibiting symptoms, or for their protection from others who may be ill.

Masks are required for students and staff in cases of early return from quarantine or isolation. Students and staff returning to school after day five would be required to wear a mask during days six through ten. Masks must also be worn by close contacts of a positive case of COVID-19 for ten days regardless of vaccination status.

Contact tracing will also continue. Students would be considered close contacts if they were within six (6) feet of an infected individual for more than 15 minutes over 24 hours. Earlier guidance allowing for an exemption from quarantine if students were consistently and correctly wearing masks in a classroom setting would no longer apply.

Vaccination and COVID histories matter for purposes of determining quarantine requirements. Those who have had COVID-19 within three months prior to being exposed and those who are up to date with vaccinations would not be required to quarantine if exposed to a positive case.

The good news is that we have almost no COVID cases in our schools. On March 1st, only seven students recently tested positive for COVID-19 and were isolating, and only seven were under quarantine. This means that contact tracing, quarantine, and other mitigation strategies that make most people cringe are unnecessary when there are few or no COVID cases.

For any change to be successful, planning and conversations are helpful in advance of the change. This letter is part of our effort to communicate with the school community to plan this significant change. There are lessons to be learned from the experience of others. We know that in some states, mask optional policies have created their share of issues, including cases of bullying. My goal is to resolve problems before they happen by creating awareness. Linked to this letter is a helpful one-page [article](#) from the Boston Children's Hospital. I believe all parents might find this article worthwhile as we move into this next stage of pandemic recovery.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark Toback". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mark Toback, Ed.D.

Superintendent of Schools