



December 11, 2021

Good afternoon!

The universal masking order for Pennsylvania schools has been lifted by action of the PA Supreme Court. Based upon our current BASD Health and Safety plan, we will be implementing a mask-optional protocol in our schools, effective immediately. PLEASE NOTE: Masking on school buses is covered by a federal regulation and is still required.

Since reopening schools and throughout this pandemic, we have done everything possible to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus within our schools. Although masking will become voluntary and at the discretion of parents, our efforts to slow the spread in our schools will continue. Other mitigation measures, such as physical distancing to the extent possible in our classrooms and requiring students who are exhibiting symptoms to go home, will continue to be implemented.

While masks are optional, we will continue to follow the same PA Department of Health (PA DoH) and the PA Department of Education (PDE) rules for responding to a positive case in our schools for now. Over the last 8 school days before the break, our protocols and processes will not change. We will continue to contact trace and identify students who are potentially close contacts. Students who are identified and confirmed as close contacts will need to quarantine. Please note, the PA DoH definitions for close contacts have not changed. If both the student who is positive is wearing a mask and the student who is identified as a potential close contact is wearing a mask (or vaccinated), the student who is the close contact does not need to quarantine, but should monitor for symptoms. When our BASD Health and Safety Plan is reviewed in January, we may need to revise our process for contact tracing given the time-consuming nature of the task and the student exclusions from school.

I'd also like to mention that according to current PA DoH and PDE guidelines, if COVID cases reach a critical level within a school, families should also know that we may be required to close our schools or move to full remote learning at a moment's notice. In addition, if we do not have adequate staffing, we also may have to close our schools or

move to fully remote learning. We are currently facing some severe staffing shortages, but we have been able to make it work due to the extraordinary efforts of our staff.. We will notify parents immediately if any major changes should occur.

We still firmly believe that in-person learning is best for our students and will do everything we can to maintain that. Our goal remains to keep our schools open and students and staff safely in school. Even with the mask mandate lifted we urge our families to do what they can to support this goal. Parents keeping their students at home when sick or when someone in the home has tested positive, helping to promote health within our school, and notifying our principals when a student tests positive is very appreciated.

As a school community, we have worked so well together to keep our students and staff as safe as possible over the past 21 months. We do not know what will happen in the new year, but we appreciate your patience and understanding as we continue to try to navigate these extremely challenging times. Thank you so very much for all you do to support our students and staff!

I hope you and your family have a super Saturday and Sunday!

Sincerely,

Tammie Burnaford
Superintendent
Bellefonte Area SD