

Shaler Area School District

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Dear Shaler Area families,

During last night's scheduled Shaler Area School Board of Directors' meeting, our school board voted to amend the district's Health and Safety Plan to require universal masking for all K-12 students and staff when in an indoor setting, regardless of vaccination status, starting on Monday, Aug. 16. We plan to reevaluate this decision in mid-September based on the transmission rates in Allegheny County and any updated guidance from health officials.

We believe that universal masking is in the best interest of maintaining the health, safety, and welfare of our students, faculty, and staff. Our goal is to ensure the maximum number of students have access to in-person instruction for the maximum number of school days in the 2021-22 school year.

- The decision aligns with guidance released by federal, state, and local health departments including the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Allegheny County Health Department—a practice that has been consistent for the school district since the beginning of the pandemic.
- Requiring universal masking and maintaining a distance of 3-6 feet between students will eliminate the need to quarantine students if a positive COVID-19 case is identified in the school setting based on [updated guidance from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention \(CDC\) guidance for K-12 students](#).
- This decision also maintains the health and safety for our students, families, and staff who are unable to receive a vaccination or who are immunocompromised.

We also took into consideration the results from the parent/guardian survey regarding mask wearing released last week. Of the more than 2,700 responses, 46 percent preferred that masks be worn on a voluntary basis and a combined 54 percent preferred that masks be worn either by all unvaccinated students and staff or regardless of vaccination status. We took all of this information into consideration when making our decision to amend the district's [Health and Safety Plan for the 2021-22 school year](#).

For the purposes of this amendment, a mask will be defined as follows:

- A mask or "face covering" is a covering of the nose and mouth that is secured to the head with ties, straps, or loops over the ears or is wrapped around the lower face.
- A mask or "face covering" can be made of a variety of synthetic or natural fabrics, including cotton, silk, or linen, and, for the purposes of the order, can include a plastic face shield that covers the nose and mouth. A plastic face shield is considered an alternative face covering and should only be worn when all other options have been exhausted.

- Masks and face coverings fall under the same requirements outlined in the student dress code and may not promote sexual activity, drugs, alcohol, tobacco, hate messages, or violence. Please see your building's student handbook for additional restrictions. Students wearing a face covering that is determined by administration to be unsafe, inappropriate, or disruptive to the educational process will be given an alternative face covering.

Any student with a disability who cannot wear a mask or face shield due to a medical condition is not required to wear face coverings as per guidance received from the state Department of Education, however, this must be recommended by the student's medical doctor and documentation is to be provided to the student's school nurse.

Additional health and safety strategies will remain in place for the start of the 2021-22 school year based on the district's Health and Safety Plan, including but not limited to:

- Masking being required on all district transportation, including after-school team and activities buses;
- Reinforcement of regular and proper handwashing;
- Hand sanitizer placed in all classrooms and high traffic areas;
- Enhanced cleaning protocols;
- Contact tracing and isolation/quarantine protocols for all non-vaccinated individuals as directed by state and local health departments;
- Seating during meal times and in the cafeteria will remain 3-6 feet, as feasible;
- Staff will continue to provide mask breaks throughout the school day.

Additionally, this amendment will extend to all visitors to our district buildings and facilities. Visitors will be required to wear a mask or face covering when indoors at any district building or facility for any reason, including to attend meetings, events, or athletic activities.

We recognize that some families may prefer a full virtual option for the 2021-22 school year based on this decision. If you have questions about our virtual options or enrollment, please contact either Dr. Shannon Howard at Howards@shalerarea.org or Mrs. Eloise Milligan at Milligane@shalerarea.org. We are happy to work with you to arrange the best instructional option for your student.

We thank you for your patience and understanding as we work to ensure a safe learning environment for our students and staff for the start of the 2021-22 school year.

Sincerely,

Sean C. Aiken, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Bryan O'Black, Ed.D.
Deputy Superintendent