

Cooperative Educational Services

5.019 Face Coverings/Masks

The first priority of Cooperative Educational Services (C.E.S.) is the health and well-being of students and staff as C.E.S. implements the safe reopening of schools. In order to maintain a healthy environment, the Representative Council will follow the mandates and requirements set forth by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), any Executive Orders issued by the Governor of the State of Connecticut, the Connecticut Department of Health (DPH) and the Connecticut State Department of Education, (hereinafter referred to as "State and Federal Guidance") as outlined in ***Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together*** which requires the wearing of face coverings for all students, staff and visitors of C.E.S. when they are inside school buildings and while riding school transportation vehicles, with certain exceptions.

The Council is implementing this requirement to wear a face covering to promote the safest possible learning, teaching and work environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. This policy pertains to students, faculty, staff, and visitors and 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.

Definitions Face covering/mask: a cloth, plastic 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 coverings or masks can help stop the spread of the virus from droplets when an individual coughs, sneezes or talks.)

Face coverings/masks should:

- Fully cover the mouth and nose;
- Fit snugly against the side of the face so there are no gaps;
- Not create difficulty breathing while worn; and
- Be held secure through either a tie, elastic, etc. to prevent slipping;
- If reusable, be made of a tightly woven, (a minimum of) two-ply material.

Face coverings/masks shall not include surgical masks or respirators (as those should be reserved for healthcare works), gaiters, bandannas, masks designed to be worn for costume purposes, or masks that include a valve. All face coverings/masks and face

shields shall meet the requirements of the appropriate dress code policies and/or codes of conduct of C.E.S.

- **Face shield** – a clear/transparent shield, typically made of a single piece of plastic, 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.
- **Clear plastic barrier** – a clear/transparent plastic or solid surface that can be cleaned and sanitized often.

Transportation: Student passengers are required to wear a face covering/mask that completely covers the nose and mouth during transit. The student's face covering/mask 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. C.E.S. shall provide back-up masks if students do not have face coverings/masks when boarding a school bus or van. The face covering/mask requirement is also applicable to the drivers of the vehicle.

School Buildings and Grounds: All students, staff, and visitors are required to use face coverings/masks that completely cover the nose and mouth when they are inside the school building or on school grounds, even when social distancing is maintained. Students and staff members shall be excused from this requirement for the following listed reasons, per State and Federal Guidance:

- Anyone who is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the face covering/mask without assistance;
- Individuals who have an approved medical exemption from C.E.S. administration in accordance with exemption rules, as noted below.

Exemption: Face coverings/masks shall not be required for anyone who has a documented medical reason making it unsafe to wear a face covering/mask. A signed, written notification from a licensed and board-certified medical doctor or psychiatrist/psychologist is required in order for the Council to permit a medical exemption. The note should state the medical reason for the requested exemption per Executive Order 7NNN.

Parents/guardians may not excuse their child from this requirement because wearing a face covering/mask 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, students may be exempted from this policy due to special behavioral or individualized needs as determined by the Director of Special Education after receipt of a signed and written notification from a licensed and board-certified medical doctor or psychiatrist/psychologist stating the need for a requested exemption.

In addition to the wearing of face coverings/masks, C.E.S. 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 exposure through increased droplets from teachers or other students during instruction. Transparent (clear) masks should be considered as an option for teachers and students in classes where it enhances instruction.

Face shields may be an option for those students with medical, behavioral or other challenges who are unable to wear face coverings/masks. The Council 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.

C.E.S. shall provide a face mask to any student, staff member or visitor if such individual does not have one. Training shall be provided by C.E.S., as necessary, regarding the proper use of face coverings/masks. Information shall be provided to staff, students and students' families regarding the proper use, removal, storage and washing of cloth face coverings.

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

Teachers and staff may be excused from wearing a face covering/mask while teaching provided they are properly socially distanced (six feet or greater.) 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 alternative to the wearing of face coverings/masks for source control.

Mask Breaks: Breaks from wearing face coverings/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.

During time of eating, face coverings/masks may be removed. Face coverings/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 face coverings/masks when students are 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 Council policy. If face coverings/masks or /face shields are required, and no exception has been applied, students and/or staff who violate this policy shall be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with the applicable Student Code of Conduct/Student Discipline Code, Staff Code of Conduct, and in accordance with policies of the Council.

In our early childhood programs, no student shall be excluded from a program or isolated from peers due to the child's non-compliance with mask wearing. Ongoing instruction on mask wearing will be provided with the goal of student compliance.

Community Outreach: C.E.S. shall engage in community education programs including signage, mass and targeted communication, and positive reinforcement that will actively promote face covering/mask use consistent with State and Federal Guidance. Community members will be reminded that this does not replace the need for social distancing, washing of hands and other preventative practices recommended by all appropriate authorities.

Other Considerations

- C.E.S. shall maintain in each school a supply of disposable face coverings/masks in the event that a staff member, student or visitor does not have one for use.
- Special attention must be given to putting on, removing, storing, and disposing of face coverings.
- Hand hygiene should be performed immediately after removing and after replacing the face covering/mask.
- The requirement of a face covering/mask will not be required by employees when they are alone in private offices. However, they are required to wear a face covering/mask when anyone enters a private office space and are required to wear one 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).

The Council will require the wearing of face coverings/masks as prescribed in this policy for the duration of the 2020-2021 academic school year. The Council grants 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, to the Executive Director.

(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.

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.

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

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: cps 7/20

**Policy adopted by the CES Representative Council on
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