



St. Martin Parish School Board

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August 6, 2021

Dear Parent:

Thank you for your letter. Governor John Bel Edwards' Proclamation of August 2, 2021 requiring all students to wear masks while at school has become a source of heated debate in every community across the state. It is an issue upon which everyone does not and never will agree. At this point, the issue is not "what is my opinion or what is that of our Board members". Rather, the issue is whether the district must follow the Governor's mandates.

La. R.S. 29:724(A) provides:

The governor is responsible for meeting the dangers to the state and people presented by emergencies or disasters, and in order to effectuate the provisions of this Chapter, the governor may issue executive orders, proclamations, and regulations and amend or rescind them. Executive orders, proclamations, and regulations so issued shall have the force and effect of law.

In addition, the legal authority of the Governor to issue such orders during health emergencies like the COVID pandemic was upheld twice last year—once in a state court ruling affirming the Governor's mask mandate and again in a United States Fifth Circuit decision related to his order closing bars and restaurants.

In light of the Governor's mandate and the forgoing statute, the St. Martin Parish School Board will comply with the requirement that students wear masks while inside school buildings and on buses. The inquiry, however, does not end there. The quarantine rules under which we will operate this year provide:

"If both the [positive] case and the contact are engaged in consistent and correct use of a well-fitting face masks AND were within 3 to 6 feet of each other, then those close contacts do not need to quarantine."

We cannot lose sight of our goals: (1) to keep our students and employees safe, and (2) to keep our schools open. We know that kids learn better in the actual classroom and that they gain important social skills when they interact with each other in person. Accordingly, the use of masks will allow us a greater chance at achieving those goals and avoiding the wholesale quarantine of large number of students as occurred last year. By way of example, both Arkansas and Mississippi began the school year without a mask mandate and they have seen incredible numbers of students and teachers test positive to the point that entire schools have been closed to live instruction within the first two weeks of school.

In short, our school district is obligated to comply with the Governor's Proclamation. Students without masks will not be allowed to attend classes on campus, but virtual instruction will be available for such students in grades 3-12 who meet the virtual instruction requirements.

Sincerely,


Mr. Allen Blanchard, Jr.
Superintendent



"PARTNERS IN EDUCATION"



Commission Des Ecoles De La Paroisse De St. Martin

