

Policy Concerning the Use of Face Masks/Coverings

This policy pertains to students, faculty, staff, and visitors.

The Board of Education (Board) is implementing this masking requirement to promote the safest possible learning, teaching and work environment for students, faculty, staff and visitors during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first priority of the Board is the health and well-being of students and staff as the District implements the safe reopening of schools.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC), the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Connecticut State Department of Education, as outlined in *Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together* and subsequent guidance, requires the wearing of face coverings for all students and staff when they are inside school buildings and while riding school transportation vehicles, with certain limited exceptions.

Definitions

Face covering/mask – a cloth, paper, 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 masks or coverings helps stop the spread of the virus, which is currently by droplets when an individual coughs, sneezes or talks.)

Face shield – a clear, plastic shield 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, along with masks or respirators.

Transportation

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

School Buildings and Grounds

All students, staff, and visitors are required to use face coverings, that completely covers the nose and mouth, when they are inside the school building or on school grounds, even when social distancing is maintained. An individual shall be excused from this requirement for the following listed reasons, per CDC guidance:

The individual:

1. has trouble breathing;
2. is unconscious;
3. is incapacitated; or
4. cannot remove the mask or face covering without assistance.

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In addition, masks or face coverings shall not be required for anyone who has a medical reason making it unsafe to wear a face mask or face covering as set forth in the most recent, applicable guidance. A written notification from a licensed medical provider, the Department of Developmental Services or other state agency that provides or supports services for people with emotional, intellectual or physical disabilities, or a person authorized by any such agency is required in order for the Board to permit a medical exemption. Recognized medical exemptions are uncommon and thus, medical documentation must be sufficient for the District to make a determination. In the case of a student request, the District may consider documentation already included in the requesting student's existing school records. Decisions regarding a requested mask exemption for students, faculty and staff will be made by the building administrator in conjunction with Central Office. When a student request for an exemption is based on a disability, then a PPT or a Section 504 meeting, as appropriate, should be contemplated and held to consider possible programming revisions or accommodations.

~~Parents/guardians may not excuse their child from this face mask requirement, by signing a waiver, because such wearing 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 to the wearing of face masks, the District will maximize social distancing between student's workstations and desks, and maximize space between the teacher and students to reduce the risk of increased droplets from teachers during instruction.

Transparent (clear) masks should be considered as an option for teachers and students in classes for hearing impaired students. Pre-K and special education teachers should consider wearing clear masks.

Face shields may be an option for those students with medical, behavioral or other challenges who are unable to wear face masks or coverings. The Board 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 adherence to social distancing guidelines.

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

Limited Exceptions to Use of Face Coverings

When other and appropriate mitigating practices are in place, such as social distancing, students will not be required to wear face masks or coverings while eating, drinking, during physical education classes, or when students are outside and effectively practicing social distancing and

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any other possible mitigants. Exceptions may also be necessary for certain special education students or other special populations.

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 alternate to the wearing of face mask for source control.

Mask Breaks

Breaks from wearing masks shall be scheduled throughout the school day, by the teacher, provided that social distancing guidelines are maintained and limitations are enforced regarding student and staff mobility.

During a time designated for eating, face masks or coverings may be removed. 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 masks when social distancing guidelines 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 Board policies.

If a student refuses to wear a face mask or covering and does not fulfill any of the limited exemptions allowed by this policy, such student shall be removed from the classroom and/or school common area and sent to an isolated area (preferably not the school's "isolation room"). The parent/guardian shall be contacted to rectify the situation, at which time school personnel should explain the options available regarding schooling and for the possible removal of the child from the school setting.

If a visitor refuses to wear a face covering, for non-medical reasons, entry to the school/district facility may be denied.

Community Outreach

The District shall engage in community education programs including signage, mass and targeted communication, and positive reinforcement that will actively promote mask use consistent with CDC, DDH, CSDE and OSHA guidance. Community members will be reminded that mask use does not replace the need for social distancing, washing of hands and other preventative practices recommended by all appropriate authorities.

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Other Considerations

- The District shall maintain in each school a supply of disposable face coverings in the event that a staff member, student or visitor does not have one for use.
- Special attention must be given to putting on and removing face coverings for purposes such as eating. After use, the front of the face covering is considered contaminated and should not be touched during removal or replacement. Hand hygiene should be performed immediately after removing and after replacing the face covering.
- Face shields with face masks may be used by staff who support students with special healthcare needs such as those who are unable to wear masks and who may need assistance with activities of daily living, such as toileting and eating.
- Mask use will not be required by staff when they are alone in private offices. However, they are required to wear a mask when anyone enters a private office space and required to wear a mask if their office space is physically shared with others and does not allow for adequate physical distancing, or if the work area is frequented by others (such as a reception area).

This policy shall remain in effect until COVID-19 is no longer declared a public health emergency or ~~the applicable Executive Orders regarding mask use have been repealed~~ the Board repeals this policy. The Superintendent and the District shall have the right to interpret and apply the provisions of this policy subject to applicable law and the most recent guidance at the time that any question, issue or inquiry arises.

(cf. 5141.22 – Communicable/Infectious Diseases)

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.
CT. Executive Order 7NNN, August 14, 2020
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
CSDE Addendum 11, Interim Guidance for Use of Face Coverings in School During Covid-19, August 31,
2020 available at <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/COVID-19/Addendum11-Interim-Guidance-for-the-Use-of-Facemasks.pdf>
CSDE September 2, 2020 FAQs available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Digest/2020-21/ReopeningFAQs_Volume3.pdf