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# Fwd: Mask Requirement Update

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email: "csmelton@lexrich5.org Christina Melton"

Thursday, April 29, 2021 at 5:06:53 PM Eastern Daylight Time

To: email: "estrange@lexrich5.org Erin Strange" , email: "kgoggins@lexrich5.org Katrina Goggins"

Bcc: email: "d5-board-members@lexrich5.org"

D5 Board Members:

This message is being blind copied to all members of the board.

Given SC. [Gov. Henry McMaster's remarks](#) on mask requirements in schools, I wanted to provide the Board with information the administration has gathered to help in your discussion with constituents and help with your next steps as a body. The remarks naturally prompted me and my staff to reach out to agencies for clarification on impacts for our district, and the feedback we gathered is posted below. Today, I have communicated directly with Superintendent Spearman and Ryan Brown , Communications Director, several times. I also organized a meeting of midlands superintendents to ensure clarity of received content.

The debate over mask requirements has become a divisive national issue, with passionate opinions on both sides. Like you, I have received emails from parents on both sides of this issue. To ensure that our schools know my expectations, I held a meeting with school principals moments ago to make sure they are aware of our current mask policy (Policy ADD) and the exemptions and also shared with them the SC Board of Education Policy, attached below. Our principals will have communication with our teachers tomorrow morning to ensure understanding of expectations.

At this time, it is not my recommendation to schedule a special-called meeting, since this matter is being explored and debated on the state level at this time. If a special-called meeting is called, the option to waive or delete Policy ADD would be available to you as a Board. The state policy would still be enforced unless an Executive Order is issued by Governor McMaster.

I will continue to provide updates to this Board so that it can make the best decisions for our schools and will continue to coordinate with state officials to get the clarity we need to assist you.

Note the attachments and hyperlinks (found in blue font) are important pieces of this complicated puzzle.

Thank you for your patience as this issue has continued to evolve today.

## **DHEC Response:**

Below is a statement attributable to Dr. Edward Simmer, DHEC Director.

“We understand that when the Governor makes a policy or decisions, he has to consider many different factors. At DHEC, our role is to focus on public health and advise the Governor on public health issues. Looking at where we are in the COVID-19 response, we are hopeful. We’re making good progress and we are starting to see infection rates drop, but we’re also still seeing a percent positivity rate around five percent and that’s concerning. That means there is still a lot of disease transmission occurring in our communities.

“Although we are getting more and more South Carolinians vaccinated, we are not close to herd immunity yet. From a public health standpoint, DHEC recommends that those municipalities with mask ordinances in place should keep them in place for now, and children should continue to wear masks in school at least through the end of this school year. When school starts in the fall, we can revisit that recommendation based on how many people are vaccinated and how close we are to herd immunity, and we are hopeful that masks will no longer need to be mandated for students. We support the current federal CDC recommendations, and we believe that staying the course with regard to wearing masks and taking other appropriate precautions for a while longer is currently the best approach for public health, and that has been and continues to be our priority.”

### **State Department of Education Response**

In multiple media reports, State schools Superintendent Molly Spearman responded to Gov. McMaster by advising districts to continue following the guidelines of public health experts. However, “if the governor feels that they are no longer needed, he has the power to issue an executive order directing districts to abandon them,” her spokesman, Ryan Brown, said.

Currently state and federal health officials (DHEC and CDC), urge that correct and consistent use of masks is critical to reducing risk of transmission in schools; information shared in a Reentry Update on Monday. No gubernatorial executive order has been issued at this time, but we will alert the school board if/when that occurs.

According to state Department of Education officials, local school boards have the authority to rescind their face covering policies. However, [the SC Department of Education's board policy would still be in effect](#). That policy aligns with the district's current policy and states the following:

#### ***School Facilities***

*Students and staff in South Carolina public schools must wear a face covering upon entering a school building, moving through hallways, during carpool/bus drop off or pickup, and when social distancing is not possible or optimal. Student face coverings may be removed upon teacher or administrator direction while in the classroom or during special activities outside the classroom.*

Copies of the state policy and our district policy are attached.

### **SC School Boards Association Response**

SCSBA sent the following statement to the media in response to Governor McMaster’s remarks regarding masks in schools.

*Working with their superintendent and school personnel, local school boards have been very careful to ensure that schools adhere to frequently changing health and safety guidance issued by federal and state authorities. In addition to the continued safety of students and staff, [the adherence to these guidelines is imperative to maintaining immunity from COVID liability, according to SCSBA-supported legislation that was recently enacted and signed by the Governor.](#)*

*As we approach the next school year, we acknowledge that guidelines may change and masks may not be required in the classroom, but until then, we must follow the recommendations of health experts regarding the safety of students and staff.*

- Scott Price, Executive Director of the South Carolina School Boards Association

The legislation referenced in SCSBA's statement is [Senate Bill 147](#).

### SCASA Response

Beth Phibbs, Executive Director of the SC Association of School Administrators, issued the following response to Governor McMaster's comments concerning masks in schools:

*This school year has been an extremely difficult one for students, teachers, parents and school leaders. We all look forward to the day when medical experts are confident that virus infection rates are consistently low enough to lift health protocols in our schools, such as wearing masks, without jeopardizing the safety of our students and staff.*

*However, until then, we will continue to work closely with medical professionals, including local hospitals, DHEC and the CDC to determine the necessary protocols to protect our students and staff.*

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#### Attachments:

**State Policy.pdf** 188k

**ADD Face Covering.pdf** 137k

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email: "[chuddle@lexrich5.org](mailto:chuddle@lexrich5.org) Cathy Huddle"

Thursday, April 29, 2021 at 6:10:23 PM Eastern Daylight Time

To: email: "[csmelton@lexrich5.org](mailto:csmelton@lexrich5.org) Christina Melton"

Cc: email: "[jhammond@lexrich5.org](mailto:jhammond@lexrich5.org) Janis Hammond" , email: "[kloveless@lexrich5.org](mailto:kloveless@lexrich5.org) Kenneth Loveless"

Dr. Melton, I appreciate you doing this research. I am sure you, like the rest of us, have much more important things to do.

Continuing to ask our children to wear masks seems downright unwarranted after staff vaccinations have had a chance to take effect. However, unfortunately I agree that S147 protecting us from immunity with the language "reasonably adheres to public guidance", means we should retain a Face Covering policy.

That said, my concern is that your expectations are not clear to parents, our community or the board.

Could you share with us, in writing, what modifications or clarifications you are making to our mask policy which offers relief to our children while still remaining in compliance with the SCED guidance?

I believe the current policy gives you the right to make adjustments and communicate them to the public. However, if you don't think the policy doesn't allow you to make those adjustments and do so publicly, or you want the board to change the policy to make that intent clear and public, then I think we should call a special meeting.

Thank you,  
Cathy

On Thu, Apr 29, 2021 at 5:07 PM Christina Melton <[csmelton@lexrich5.org](mailto:csmelton@lexrich5.org)> wrote:

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Catherine Huddle  
Lexington Richland Five School Board Trustee

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