

March 8, 2022

Dear WCUUSD Community,

Thank you for continuing to be patient with us as we work to incorporate all of this new guidance. After the February 15th press conference with Governor Scott, we let you know that we were anticipating lifting the mask mandate at U-32 on March 9th. This decision was subject to change based on new guidance and Covid activity after Winter Break. Last Friday, the CDC updated their Covid-19 guidance, and on March 3 Governor Scott held another press conference with even more changes to State guidance. Please read the following summary of the Agency of Education [Memo](#) dated March 3 carefully.

As of March 14th, all State school-specific guidance will be ending. At this time, schools should encourage their students, staff and families to follow the Vermont Department of Health's [recommendations for all Vermonters](#). The Health Department will update these recommendations as public health circumstances warrant and we have been told to expect an update on March 14th to reflect their consideration and interpretation of the new CDC Community Level [recommendations](#).

We at WCUUSD are using the CDC community level tool to inform our current decision making. COVID-19 Community Levels are a new tool to help communities decide what prevention steps to take based on the latest data and are updated weekly. Levels can be low, medium, or high and are determined by looking at hospital beds being used, hospital admissions, and the total number of new COVID-19 cases in an area. Take precautions to protect yourself and others from COVID-19 based on the COVID-19 Community Level in your area. **Currently, Washington County is at a MEDIUM level.**

| Low | Medium | High |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccines● Get tested if you have symptoms | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● If you are at high risk for severe illness, talk to your healthcare provider about whether you need to wear a mask and take other precautions | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Wear a mask indoors in public● Stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccines● Get tested if you have symptoms● Additional precautions may be needed for people at |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccines ● Get tested if you have symptoms | high risk for severe illness |
|--|---|--|

People may choose to mask at any time. People with [symptoms](#), a [positive test](#), or [exposure to someone with COVID-19](#) **should wear a mask.**

Therefore, as of Monday, March 14th, we anticipate all WCUUSD schools will be moving to a MASK-OPTIONAL protocol, regardless of vaccination rate. This includes school buses, as the Federal [recommendations](#) are to have the bus protocol be in line with school protocol. In moving forward with this new guidance based on Community Levels, we need to be aware that should Washington County return to a High Level, we will return to universal mask wearing indoors at all our schools, regardless of vaccination rate. Please be sure to discuss this with your children so everyone understands if we need to pivot again. We need to normalize masking in times of high viral activity, as we have seen this virus change multiple times and should assume we will continue to see changing levels of transmission within our community.

A colleague hit the nail on the head during a recent meeting when she compared masking to insect repellent usage. We don't wear insect repellent in the winter, as we know there is a low chance of black fly activity. We do, however, keep that tool available, knowing that June has the potential for lots of itchy bites! In the same vein, we do not need universal masking in times of low viral activity (which has historically been late Spring to Fall) but we should be prepared for the possibility of new variants that could require the use of masks indoors again. Keep those tools handy!

Due to the decline in community cases, our excellent track record of low transmission in our schools, and Federal and State health officials' confidence that we are entering the endemic phase of Covid-19, WCUUSD is prepared to begin a return to pre-pandemic practices this week and a move to being MASK-OPTIONAL AS OF MONDAY MARCH 14th. Elementary schools, including Pre-K, will see a loosening of restrictions such as podding and eating in separate classrooms. This will look different in every school based on space and staffing differences.

We anticipate that many students and staff will continue to prefer to wear masks while in school. Please remember that some folks are, or live with, vulnerable or immunocompromised people and we don't know everyone's reasons for the choices they make. I would like to encourage everyone to be kind to each other and respect these personal choices. We have done an amazing job of working hard as a community to keep each other safe and while we will no

longer require universal masking in our schools, WCUUSD encourages staff and students to recognize that differing opinions are normal, expected and accepted. We should refrain from passing judgment on others based on those choices. Above all, please be kind.

Once wearing masks is optional in Washington Central, parents will need to understand and accept that staff will no longer be enforcing mask usage by any students in any WCUUSD schools. If you would like your child to continue wearing a mask to school, you will need to have that conversation as a family. If a student comes to school in a mask and removes it once at school, we will not be asking them to put it back on. Please do not ask teachers and staff to enforce your child's masking practice, regardless of age. Doing so would detract from educational time and could create conflict in the classroom. If you have questions or concerns about this new protocol, please reach out to me directly at mmelekos@u32.org.

Our District illness policy is not changing at this time. Staff and students should monitor for [symptoms of COVID-19](#), regardless of vaccination status. If staff or students have any symptoms of COVID-19, they should stay home from school, and test for Covid. Everyone needs to be symptom-free for >24 hours prior to return to school. WCUUSD is still providing rapid antigen tests for students and staff as needed. **Per the CDC and the Vermont DOH, any student or staff member who tests positive for COVID 19 will be required to wear a mask in all of our school buildings from Day 6 through Day 10 after their positive diagnosis, or continue to isolate at home for the full 10 days.**

According to Governor Scott, the State is continuing its two current Covid-19 school-based testing programs - Staff Assurance Testing and Test at Home - for the near future. He did state that they would be phased out at some point, and as soon as we hear any more about that, we will communicate it with the community.

Please reach out to mmelekos@u32.org or at 802-229-0553 x 1317 with any questions or concerns.

We can't say it enough - we are all in this together. As a District, we greatly appreciate our community's support during this pandemic. Everyone's willingness to adhere to the ever-changing guidelines throughout the last few years has been inspiring and humbling. Our goal is to continue to be respectful of all our community members and to continue to work together to stay safe.

Thank you,

Maria Melekos, Covid-19 Coordinator
Jennifer Miller-Arsenault, Interim Superintendent