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Attention Families - Important FAQ Regarding Recent Questions

1 message

Dr. Bridget O'Connell <superintendent@palisadesd.org>
Reply-To: "Dr. Bridget O'Connell" <superintendent@palisadesd.org>
To: dholmes@palisadesd.org

Tue, Aug 24, 2021 at 7:00 PM

**August 24, 2021****Dear Palisades Community,**

As you are aware, Palisades successfully partnered with the Bucks County Department of Health all of last year to keep students in school while mitigating the spread of COVID. This partnership led to outstanding student academic, athletic, and extracurricular accomplishments. Our goal this year is to continue that partnership and afford our students every opportunity to enjoy another year of uninterrupted, in person instruction. I look forward to seeing your children on August 30th and will continue to enjoy their successes with our community over the upcoming school year.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bridget O'Connell".

Dr. Bridget O'Connell**Superintendent****Health and Safety Plan FAQ****MASKING:**

1. At the end of last school year the Board approved a plan that said mask wearing was optional for all students, employees and visitors once the Governor lifted the universal masking order. Why are we back to requiring mask wearing for all when inside our school buildings?

On Tuesday, August 17th, the Bucks County Department of Health updated their guidance to follow CDC guidance on masking in schools due to:

- 1. County transmission rate moving from substantial to high**
- 2. Recommendation from regional hospitals due to concerns about pediatric COVID cases putting additional stress on the hospital system. Pediatric specialty hospitals are already operating at close to capacity due to non-COVID illnesses and staffing shortages.**

During the Board meeting on August 18th, the Board considered the updated guidance from the BCDH and passed a Health and Safety Plan requiring mask wearing for all while inside school buildings and on school buses. The mandate was set to begin on Thursday, August 19th.

NOTE: Late last evening, additional direction was provided for schools by the Bucks County Department of Health; this latest direction is not related to masking, however it demonstrates the fluidity of communication from the [COB School Guidance 08-23-2021.pdf](#)

2. Under what authority can the Board require masking?

Section 510 of the School Code, 24 P.S. §5-510, provides the authority for the Board to mandate the use of face coverings in the current situation of the pandemic. Based on the language in this section, the School Board of Directors has broad authority to set reasonable rules concerning all sorts of matters regarding both employees and students of the district at all times during the school day and including, for students, transportation to and from school. There is no requirement that there be specific authority for a face covering mandate. Rather section 510 provides the needed authority.

The only remaining question is whether a face covering mandate is a “reasonable rule”. There can be no doubt, according to the district’s solicitor, a face covering mandate within the Health and Safety Plan is reasonable, in view of current CDC guidance and current Bucks County Dept. of Health guidance, both of which recommend the use of face coverings. Finally, the Health and Safety Plan conforms to the requirements set forth by the Pa. Dept. of Education and is therefore, in the opinion of our solicitor, legally acceptable.

3. Does this mandate by the Board mean that students and staff will wear masks all year long while indoors and on buses?

The Health and Safety Plan notes that we will continue to adapt our plan to changing conditions based on a variety of factors including: level of community transmission, vaccination levels, monitoring illness and identifying clusters, and updated guidance from national, state and local levels.

4. What if my child has medical or other conditions that prevent them from wearing a mask?

As was our practice during last school year when students, staff and visitors wore masks, a medical exemption (signed by your child’s medical provider) is the only exception that will be accepted. Any IEP that currently has a masking accommodation from last school year will be honored.

Please submit the attached medical authorization to Lou deFonteny, Director of Student Services at ldfonteny@palisd.org - [Face Mask Medical Exemption Form](#)

5. I already created and submitted my own exemption form. Will that be accepted?

The district has many expectations for student behavior and the proper wearing of a mask is just another expectation set forth by the Board. A parent cannot opt their child out of other behavioral expectations (compulsory attendance, not using tobacco products on school property, dress code expectations, etc.). Similarly, a parent cannot opt their child out of the expectation of proper mask wearing.

Please see question #4 regarding a mask wearing exception for medical reasons.

6. How will you enforce the mask mandate in our schools? Will students who are not masked be disciplined?

The masking mandate will be enforced when inside our school buildings and when on school buses. School administration will address masking violations and will begin with a reminder that students are expected to wear a mask while in school and on the bus. If a student forgot their mask one will be provided; however, repeated violations will result in parent notification and further disciplinary action. If you are in a financial situation that prevents you from providing a mask for your child, please contact your child’s counselor for assistance in securing a mask.

7. Will mask breaks be provided for students throughout the school day?

Yes. We will continue our practice, implemented during last school year, of providing mask breaks throughout the school day for up to 10 minutes per break provided students are distanced 3’ or more. Additionally, our teachers will continue to use outdoor spaces to conduct lessons when possible; masks are not required when students/staff are outside.

8. What about mask wearing during lunch?

Students will be seated 3’ apart from each other during lunches. Of course, masks need not be worn while students are actively eating or drinking at lunchtime; however, they will be directed to put their masks over their mouth and nose when not eating or drinking.

9. Will parents/guardians or other visitors who visit the schools be required to wear a mask?

Yes. Anyone who enters a school building at any time is required to wear a mask.

10. Did Palisades receive special funding from the state or a visit by the PA Secretary of Education because the Board voted to require masking?

No. The district is not receiving special funding from the state as a result of requiring all employees, students and visitors to wear a mask when indoors.

The purpose of the Secretary of Education's visit was scheduled as a result of an earlier invitation from Dr. O'Connell when they met at the Upper Bucks County Technical School. He and Dr. Carrera, his Executive Deputy, were interested in learning more about the Palisades School District, the steps we took last school year to keep our schools open, to meet the new teachers and their mentors participating in our teacher induction program, to tour the new science wing in our high school and to thank our district for providing vaccinations for students, staff and community members on 4 occasions with the help of our partners on this effort, AMI.

TESTING:

11. Will nurses test students for COVID without parent/guardian consent?

No, nurses will not test students for COVID without parent/guardian consent.

Last year several testing locations were set up throughout the county and parents/guardians were referred there if their child was symptomatic. Now, however, those testing locations have become vaccine clinics and are no longer testing sites. Going into the coming school year, we are working to determine if county testing locations will be reinstated.

Furthermore, IF testing were made available to schools for symptomatic students by the Department of Health AND parents/guardians find it to be more convenient for their child to be tested at school rather than taking their symptomatic child to another testing site, testing could be provided ONLY with parent/guardian consent. Currently, the district does not have any testing ability for symptomatic students.

VACCINATIONS:

12. Will my child be required to be vaccinated against COVID?

At this time, the only vaccine available to children ages 12 and over is the Pfizer vaccine, which just received FDA approval for those 16 and older. At this time, the vaccination requirements for children attending public schools in the state of Pennsylvania are attached below. Any changes in vaccination requirements for students will be confirmed by the Department of Education at the state level.

The current list is posted on our website: [Vaccination Flyer](#)

13. Will the school vaccinate my child without my consent?

No, your child will not be vaccinated in school without your consent.

Palisades has held 4 vaccine clinics since Pfizer was approved for emergency use authorization in children 12 and older. Through those clinics, staffed by AMI personnel, over 130 students were vaccinated and in each case, parent/guardian consent was provided.

14. Is the Palisades Cyber Academy (PCA) still an available option this year?

Yes. Similarly to last year, the Palisades Cyber Academy will be taught by Palisades teachers. If you are interested in enrolling your child in PCA please contact your child's elementary school principal or middle or high school guidance counselor. For more information, please refer to the PCA page on the district website at https://www.palisd.org/our_district/palisades_cyber_academy___p_c_a_

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