



February 17, 2022

Dear RCPS Students and Families,

The Virginia General Assembly recently passed Senate Bill 739 which Governor Youngkin signed into law effective March 1, 2022. More specifically, SB 739 enables parents of students in public elementary and secondary schools and in public school-based early childhood care and education programs the option to choose whether their children will wear a mask while on school property. As a result, Rockbridge County Public Schools will transition to a mask-optional learning environment for all students in our buildings, effective February 28, 2022. However, we will continue to strongly encourage mask-wearing as a key strategy in our efforts to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in our schools and community. The federal requirement for everyone to wear a mask while on public transportation remains in effect (busing to and from any school, field trips, sports trips, etc.).

Vaccination levels for school-age students remain low in our community and transmission rates for COVID-19 remain high. Virginia Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI) regulations require all employees to wear masks if the geographic area in which the employer is located is ranked high or substantial as measured by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC)/Virginia Department of Health (VDH) transmission metrics. Until transmission metrics improve, all employees of Rockbridge County Public Schools will be required to continue wearing masks while on school property. This continued mandate follows current DOLI regulations and is intended to minimize transmission of COVID-19. We cannot operate our schools if we do not have adequate staff due to illness. We will continue to monitor any potential updates in the DOLI regulations as well as the community transmission rates in our area.

As has been the case for the past several weeks, RCPS will continue to follow the CDC's shortened timeline for COVID-positive individuals or those who are exposed to a COVID-positive individual. The CDC shortened timeline consists of five (5) days of isolation/quarantine, provided the individual is asymptomatic, and followed by five (5) days of required mask-wearing to minimize the risk of infecting others. Parents who choose to keep their children home for the full 10-day quarantine/isolation period (instead of returning with a mask on for days #6-10) may choose to do so. These absences from school will be excused for students and they will be permitted to make up all missed work.

Beginning February 28, contact tracing in most occurrences will be more closely aligned with recently updated VDH guidelines. RCPS will focus our efforts in contact tracing primarily for outbreaks in congregate settings such as grade levels, staff members, or an entire school. We will continue to work closely with the VDH to determine next steps should an outbreak occur.

Rockbridge County Public Schools continues to support the following mitigation strategies:

- Students and visitors who elect to wear masks at school may and are encouraged to do so.
- Promote vaccination and boosters to allow fully vaccinated asymptomatic persons to avoid quarantine.
- Maintain physical distancing (3-6 feet in the classroom, 6 feet at lunch).
- Ventilation to meet code along with more frequent filter changes.
- Handwashing and respiratory etiquette.
- Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities.
- Staying home when sick and getting tested.

If you have any questions, please contact a school administrator or nurse. As we continue to move forward in the 2021-2022 school year, we will continue to update the RCPS Covid-19 Dashboard of positive student and staff cases. [Click here to review the RCPS Return to Learn website and Covid-19 Dashboard.](#)

We also ask everyone to be mindful and respectful of individual choices regarding optional mask-wearing in schools. Any student who forgets a mask is welcome to request one from the school office. Thank you for your continued support of teaching and learning in Rockbridge County Public Schools.

Phillip Thompson, Ed.D.
Division Superintendent