



February 23, 2022

Dear EASTCONN Families, Staff and Students,

On Monday, February 28, 2022, the Governor's executive order mandating mask-wearing in the state expires, allowing school local leaders to determine the best course of action going forward. This legislative change is based on information that transitions our communities from a pandemic emergency response model to a disease prevention model.

It is important to note that the CDC continues to recommend mask wearing for K-12 schools. It is our understanding that the CDC will be revising its recommendations regarding mask-wearing in the next few weeks. We have consistently followed CDC guidance, and it makes the most sense for us to continue to follow that guidance until it is revised.

After consultation with EASTCONN's three health districts, and after careful consideration of regional and school/program data, **EASTCONN has decided to continue requiring masks inside our K-12 schools and programs through March 18.** Maintaining the mask mandate through mid-March will provide us time to receive and take into account new CDC guidance.

Over the next few weeks, we will also work with staff and students supporting those who might experience stress, fear or anxiety about being in school situations where masks are not being worn. We expect *everyone* to show acceptance of the individual choice that will be provided once we decide to lift the mask mandate.

Furthermore, the legislation that was passed eliminating state mask-wearing has given the Commissioners of Education, Early Childhood, and Public Health the authority to invoke mandatory mask-wearing in school through June of 2022 *should the need arise*. As a result, we will remain prepared to adjust our approach as needed. Students and staff *will still be required to wear a mask upon return from a positive COVID case in accordance with our current procedures*. We will continue to monitor and adjust, evaluating and being flexible as we move into spring.

**The following protocols/recommended procedures related to COVID-19 will remain in effect for EASTCONN schools and facilities:**

- Recommending [COVID-19 vaccination](#) for all eligible students and staff, including [booster vaccine doses](#) when appropriate.
- **Supporting** students and staff who choose to continue [wearing a mask](#) even when school policies do not require their use.
- **Following** [isolation guidelines](#) for students and staff who have symptoms associated with, or have tested positive for, COVID-19.

- Recommending **COVID-19 transmission prevention strategies**, [including testing \(self-testing and/or at provider sites\) and masking](#) for students and staff, **following illness or exposures** to COVID-19 cases.
- Continuing to advise parents to report all cases of COVID-19 to the school and subsequently schools continuing to [report identified cases](#) to their local health department and the Connecticut Department of Public Health.
- Being prepared to **respond quickly to rapid increases in cases** or clusters of cases in schools (including increases in absenteeism due to respiratory illness) as described below.
- Continuing to follow [existing quarantine guidance](#) for students and staff who have been notified of certain higher-risk close contact exposures (e.g., household exposures, crowded social gatherings).
- Continuing to wear **masks on school buses** is a federal order issued by the CDC. Barring any action from the CDC, this order remains in place. **Students and adults are required to continue wearing a mask on the school bus.**
- **Head Start programs** are still required to follow CDC guidelines, continue masking and follow Federal Office of Head Start vaccination and testing policies as included in Performance Standards until further notice.

We understand that our community, and the nation, is divided on whether or not to wear a mask. We have carefully taken into account the many factors of science, health, and the social emotional well-being of everyone in our decision. Despite individual opinions about mask-wearing, we all have the common goal of returning to a sense of normalcy.

As we learn to manage COVID-19, we will remain flexible. We anticipate lifting our mask requirement as warmer weather approaches, as flu season diminishes and when the CDC releases its new guidance, and we will inform you of that decision promptly. In preparation, we will be working with students to understand and respect the diversity of choice people will have when that occurs. We appreciate your patience and collaboration as we navigate our way through the remainder of the year.

EASTCONN will continue to seek guidance from our local health districts, medical advisors, the Connecticut Departments of Health and Education, and the CDC to inform our decisions moving forward. As always, providing a safe, supportive learning environment physically and socially emotionally is our first priority.

Sincerely,

Diane Dugas, Director of Leading and Learning  
 Amy Margelony, Director of Pupil Services  
 Diane Gozemba, Director of Early Childhood Initiatives