

TO: Arlington School Committee  
FROM: Dr. Elizabeth C. Homan, Superintendent  
RE: Mask Requirement in Arlington Public Schools  
DATE: 3/3/2022

On February 9, 2022, Governor Baker and Commissioner Riley announced a change in the state mask requirement for schools. Effective Monday, February 28th, the DESE mask requirement for schools has been lifted across the state. This means masking requirements are now a local decision. Additionally, on Wednesday, February 16th, 2022, the Arlington Board of Health lifted the Town of Arlington Masking Requirement for public spaces.

For these reasons, I am recommending that **effective March 7th, 2022, masks will be optional for all students and staff in the Arlington Public Schools, except in the following situations, where masks will continue to be required:**

1. All staff at Menotomy Preschool and APS Daycares except when instructionally appropriate and beneficial for staff to remove masks, based on staff's professional judgment;
2. All students at Menotomy Preschool and APS Daycares who are between the ages of 2-5 and are able to wear masks. Families may apply and qualify for a [special mask exemption](#) for their student at Menotomy Preschool and APS Daycares. **The masking requirements at Menotomy Preschool and in APS Daycares will be revisited at least monthly;**
3. on all school buses and transportation vans through at least the month of March;
4. in all school health offices and medical waiting rooms; and
5. for COVID-19 positive individuals who return to school as part of our test-to-return program during days 6-10, except when eating, drinking, or outdoors.

**This recommendation is based on the following data:**

1. APS vaccination rates for eligible students range from 85-94%;
2. The APS staff vaccination rate is 97.9%;
3. Approximately 70% of all APS students & staff are participating in weekly PCR pool testing;

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4. The number of positive pools and cases in the schools, town, county, and state have dramatically decreased;
  5. 80% of students and staff are participating in the at-home testing program; and
  6. COVID-19 levels in our area have reached their lowest levels since July of 2021, according to the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority.

**The following APS COVID-19 mitigation measures will continue:**

1. Weekly pooled testing;
2. In-school and at-home symptomatic testing;
3. [APS Test-to-return](#) for individuals who test positive for COVID-19;
4. [APS At-home Testing Program](#);
5. Regular replacement of MERV-13 air filters on all air filtration systems in our schools (filters last replaced in January 2022, and will be replaced again in April 2022); and
6. Use of stand-alone HEPA air filters in all instructional spaces.

It is the Administration's intention to avoid imposing additional restrictions and to avoid actions that result in loss of time in school; however, in the event it becomes necessary, **APS will keep the following tools in our "COVID-19 Outbreak Response Toolbox:"**

1. The ability to flexibly re-impose masking restrictions when the alternative may be missed days of school for students in a classroom or school where an outbreak occurs;
2. The ability to flexibly re-impose physical distancing and cohorting restrictions in individual classrooms, lunch rooms, or schools;
3. The ability to repeat-test consented students in classrooms where outbreaks occur; and
4. As a last resort, the ability to close a classroom or school when ventilation is compromised or when outbreaks occur.

APS defines an "outbreak" as a localized instance of multiple cases in a single classroom or school, with evidence of school-based person-to-person transmission. Each time there is an outbreak, we collaborate with the Arlington Department of Health and Human Services and on occasion DESE to determine next steps.

The APS intends to help all students understand and value their peers' personal choices made in partnership with their caregivers, and asks that families reinforce the important message

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that individuals will elect to change their masking practices at different times. Teachers will be discussing the shift to optional masking with students during the week of February 28th, 2022.

2022 has been a year of swiftly shifting guidelines, expectations, and protocols as we responded first to the Omicron wave and now our transition to fewer restrictions. We are committed to maintaining safety so that students can continue to learn in-person, every day; a commitment we made in our Pandemic Recovery Plan in August, 2021. The disruptions of the past 2 years have taken a significant toll on students, families, and the committed APS staff who work in our schools, and we are looking forward to relaxing restrictions. At the same time, we recognize that this time may present new risks and challenges to some of the most vulnerable members of our community. We must take the needs of ALL students into consideration as we move forward, and we continue to thank the Arlington community for their continued patience, perseverance, and partnership.

Sincerely,

Dr. Elizabeth C. Homan

Superintendent, Arlington Public Schools