



July 23, 2021

Secretary Mark Ghaly, MD, MPH
California Health and Human Services Agency
1660 Ninth Street, Room 460
Sacramento, California 95814

Sent to recipients via email.

Subject: Inquiry Relating to School Indoor Face Mask Requirement

Dear Secretary Ghaly,

On behalf of the county superintendents across the state, we write to request additional information relating to the "COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K-12 Schools in California, 2021-22 School Year" ("Guidance") released on July 12, 2021, by the California Department of Public Health ("CDPH" or "Department"). In short, we seek direction and information on potential future changes to the indoor masking requirement for all K-12 students.

As educational leaders, we fully appreciate the complexity that informs your Department's regular updates to the Guidance for K-12 schools. This is why, for the past 16 months, we have worked hand-in-hand with our local health officers to understand and apply the Department's Guidance as it evolves. The same is true for our efforts to coordinate with CDPH and local health jurisdictions to aggressively establish COVID-19 testing and vaccination sites when asked. We wholly endorse the principle set forth in your Guidance to ensure all students "have access to safe and full in-person instruction and to as much instructional time as possible."

The COVID-19 pandemic has occasionally caused our respective lanes — public education and public health — to cross in unlikely ways. Yet the public health rules set by the CDPH and enforced by local public health departments are unmistakably your purview, not ours. We therefore seek clarity when the Guidance evolves.

The CDPH's Guidance of July 12, 2021, states: "K-12 students are required to mask indoors, with exemptions" only as specified in the CDPH face mask guidance. The indoor student masking requirement applies even to fully vaccinated students. This was a momentous announcement for students, parents, staff, and administrators, alike. School leaders are being inundated with inquiries and concerns from their communities. Their urgency arises, in part, from the fact that many of our schools are already open or starting instruction just weeks from now. We share this sense of urgency.

- 1. Under what circumstances, if any, will face masks become optional for fully vaccinated students or all students on a schoolsite?**
- 2. Will the CDPH develop a county-wide or community-wide threshold for local case rates and vaccination rates that will inform future flexibility on student masking?**



We acknowledge the complexities implicit to this inquiry, including the emergence of the Delta variant, the discrepant reactions by communities to masking mandates and masking flexibilities, and the challenges of masking enforcement in general. Yet we would be remiss not to ask. The fact is these questions are currently being asked of educational leaders across the state notwithstanding the clear lanes separating public health and public education.

In your role, we know these decisions require deliberation and time. For our part, the more we can anticipate potential changes, the better we can implement them. Thank you for your attention to these important questions. We appreciate our continued partnership to ensure our students have access to safe and full in-person instruction to the greatest extent possible, and we look forward to hearing from you soon to discuss this in greater detail. Please contact Karen Stapf Walters, CCSESA Executive Director, at kstapfwalters@ccsesa.org or by phone at 916.214.4443 with any questions.

Yours in education,

L.K. Monroe
Alameda County Superintendent of Schools
President, CCSESA

cc: Tomás J. Aragón, MD, DrPH, Director and State Health Officer, California Department of Public Health
Dr. Naomi Bardach, Lead, Safe Schools for All Team
Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond, President, State Board of Education
Brooks Allen, Executive Director, State Board of Education
Ben Chida, Chief Deputy Cabinet Secretary, Office of Governor Newsom