



NATICK PUBLIC SCHOOLS CENTRAL OFFICE

Dr. Anna Nolin, Superintendent
Timothy Luff, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services
Dr. Peter Gray, Assistant Superintendent of Finance
Susan Balboni, Interim Director of Teaching, Learning, and Innovation

To: School Committee

From: Anna Nolin, Superintendent

Re: Masking

Date: February 18, 2022, February 28, 2022, will be updated again for the BOH meeting Friday, March 4th, 2022, noon.

Summary of Masking Situation

The Department of Secondary and Elementary Education (DESE) has notified us that they will lift the state wide mask mandate as of 2/28 for all schools in the Commonwealth.

Natick Board of Health and the Natick School committee both had masking mandates/policy in place prior to DESE enacting such a mandate.

On February 9th, I recommended to the Board of Health a March 7th removal of mask mandate/implementation of a flex mask culture for our district pending the results of our two antigen testing dates (Sunday 2/27 and 3/1).

The Board of Health Meeting went in a different direction and indicated they would look at the schools mandate at their March 15th meeting; they then voted a singular mandate to retain masking for schools and lifted the town mask mandate.

Now, I have requested an additional meeting with the Natick Board of Health on 3/4 so we can assess post-vacation data on infection rates, absences, and testing results, and then we will determine if we can move to the flex masking culture. I will share the details of both our expected flex mask culture and further updates at the 2/28 school committee meeting and in a subsequent update to you.

Today, the Director of Public Health Indicated that we will indeed meet at noon on Friday, March 4, 2022 with the board.

The SC Policy Committee's Voted Recommendation

The school committee policy sub committee met on February 17 and voted the following recommendation to the committee at large. The committee will meet on the 28th to decide how to approach masking and work in concert with the Board of Health who we have asked

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to meet with us on March 4th to determine if the school mask mandate can be lifted. Their voted language is as follows: *"Move that the policy committee recommend that SC rescind Policy EBCFA (Face Coverings) effective the first school day following the date on which the BOH rescinds the Natick Public School Masking requirement."*

The full School Committee unanimously voted on 2/28/22 to implement the above language.

Superintendent's Recommendation

It is my recommendation that you vote on 2/28 to rescind your mask mandate which is the required process for the policy that you wrote and use the language provided by the policy sub committee. I do not think you need a new masking policy. Instead, I need you to allow administration to implement a flexible masking culture, which relies on us teaching tolerance, allowing for choice and family and staff values to be supported by us. I have developed the below document and will share it with the community today. Should the department of public health see a surge in the future, they could then institute a town or school mask mandate. You could also choose to do that as a committee should the data demand it. If it did, I would bring that recommendation to you.

I have been working with the Director of Public Health and the chair of the Board of Health every day this week, and they are supportive of removing the mandate if the data collected and reviewed on the next two Fridays (Mr. Boudreau receives reports like the one I shared with you today each Friday), does not indicate a spike/surge in infections.

I strongly believe that the COVID risk to our children at this time does not outweigh the greater need to unmask for our students. I have not felt this way until this time period.

The following other items in our environment allow me to make this case and my strong recommendation to unmask:

- 100% of staff, consultants and visitors/volunteers interacting with our students are in compliance with vaccination policies
- 100% of our staff are in compliance with vaccination policy, protecting our workforce from school outages, fewer substitutes needed
- 0 NPS students have been hospitalized during the pandemic (none reported to BOH or to us)
- 84 % vaccination rate for all students

- 75% of 5300 students are participating in weekly antigen testing--a representative sampling of the community allowing us to detect surges
- Air purification systems in all classrooms
- Masking on buses and in clinics
- Provisions for protecting vulnerable populations as needed (which returns us to pre-pandemic procedures for health and safety).
- Agreement with Director of Public Health's recommendation to strongly recommend that preschoolers and those interacting with them remain masked
- Every community around us, save Lexington, Brookline and Boston will have already unmasked or will unmask by March 7th citing similar comfort with the virus rates dropping.

Below is the infections reported for the two week period of February Break and the week after Break. Ten cases among students and 2 among staff.

Case ID	District Name	District Code	School Name	School Code	Student Count	All Staff Count	Case Date/Time Updated	Case Updated By	Case Date/Time Entered	Case Created By	Action
97647	Natick	01980000	Wilson Middle	01980310	0	0			03/02/2022 14:56	Anna Nolin	Delete
97646	Natick	01980000	Natick High	01980505	3	0			03/02/2022 14:56	Anna Nolin	Delete
97645	Natick	01980000	Lilja Elementary	01980035	1	1			03/02/2022 14:55	Anna Nolin	Delete
97644	Natick	01980000	Johnson	01980031	1	0			03/02/2022 14:55	Anna Nolin	Delete
97643	Natick	01980000	J F Kennedy Middle School	01980305	3	0			03/02/2022 14:55	Anna Nolin	Delete
97641	Natick	01980000	Brown	01980010	1	1			03/02/2022 14:54	Anna Nolin	Delete
97639	Natick	01980000	Bennett-Hemenway	01980005	1	1			03/02/2022 14:54	Anna Nolin	Delete

I welcome your feedback on the draft below which will guide operations in the event that a mask mandate is lifted. Like me, you have received many emails on all sides of this issue and I believe the guidance below strikes the balance in addressing concerns.

Guidance for the Community If Mask Mandate is Lifted
[Draft Flex Mask Document](#)

Should surges or changes to the agreed upon metrics used by the Department of Public Health and Natick Schools over the last two years (daily incidents, absences, infection rates over 7 days) reflect a surge, we will pivot to masking again. The current pandemic policy in place allows me to do that in concert with the Department of Public Health and they also have the capacity to make such an implementation if they see a public health need.