

District Update
July 21, 2021

To All Pecatonica School Families and Staff,

The Pecatonica Board of Education conducted their regularly scheduled meeting on Monday, July 19th. There was great discussion between the members of our Board and administrative team members on the Return to School plan for the upcoming school year. The vast majority of that conversation pertained to the topic of masks.

On July 9th the CDC released new information that was quickly adopted in full by IDPH and ISBE. The CDC/IDPH and ISBE have recommended that masks be worn by those who are unvaccinated. They have also recognized some level of local control now that we are in Phase 5 as stated:

"Together with local public health officials, school administrators should consider multiple factors when they make decisions about implementing layered prevention strategies against COVID 19. Since schools typically serve their surrounding communities, decisions should be based on school population, families and students served, as well as their communities".

The Winnebago County Health Department has provided school districts with a list of mitigation strategies that should be taken into consideration when implementing layered prevention strategies that could possibly allow for a local decision to be made that could make masking optional. I stress the words "possibly" and "could" because at this time there has been no official decision made on what position the Pecatonica School District will take on masking. We continue to examine the challenges some of the suggested mitigation strategies place on our daily operational procedures that could impact our students and staff. I am scheduled to attend another Zoom meeting with the Winnebago County Health Department and area Superintendents on Friday, July 23rd at 8:30 AM. My hope is that at the conclusion of that meeting a clearer picture is available as to the best direction for our school district to take.

As stated, there was great discussion on the topic of masks at our recent Board meeting. The topic of masks seems to have become even more divisive as the pandemic continues while Illinois moved into and remains in Phase 5 and many avenues being fully open. I am aware that some neighboring school districts have announced or plan to announce shortly their Return to School plans and whether masking will be optional or mandated. I also understand that our Pecatonica Community is anxiously wondering the same thing. As the new Superintendent of our schools, I am doing my due diligence to make sure our Board of Education and administrative team have all the information we need to come to a consensus on the topic of masks that provides the safest and most successful option for our students and staff. I believe there is a possibility of masking being optional to start the school year so long as the District can effectively implement as many of the other layered mitigation strategies to provide as safe of an environment as possible. Everyone in our community needs to understand up front that while there is a possibility of masks being optional to start a school year, there is a possibility that masks mandates could be implemented for periods of time dependent on negative metrics.

Again, my hope is that the meeting with the WCHD on Friday goes well. If the meeting does go well, we would look to schedule a Special Board meeting hopefully as early as next week to formalize our Return to School Plan for the upcoming school year. Your continued patience is greatly appreciated and be on the lookout for any additional updates as they become available.

Take care,
Carl B. Carlson
Superintendent