

March 10, 2022

Good Afternoon South Orange & Maplewood School District Community,

Click the link to view full SOMSD's "Indoor Mask Optional" survey results: bit.ly/3hRq03Z

Dear SOMSD Community,

Based on the updated guidance from the NJDOH and in collaboration with our local health departments, the South Orange & Maplewood School District will move to a "mask optional" plan in our K-12 schools, buses and district office buildings (*PreK school communities will continue with mask mandate, further information can be found on the bottom of page 2*). This updated plan is effective **Monday, March 14, 2022**.

We want to thank our students, staff, and families for following our mitigation measures over the past year and a half. We know it has not been easy. Thanks to your efforts, we have been able to keep one another safe and continue with in-person learning. We also thank our staff, parent/guardian and student community for your responses to the "indoor mask option" survey and for your patience and continued support as the District sought to implement the best decisions possible to keep our staff and student community safe.

The survey results can be found in the link above and below we offer a broad overview of the results, based on three key survey questions:

Audience	# of Submissions	Do you think it's time for SOMSD to make masks optional indoors?	*If indoor masks were optional, would you still have your child(ren) wear one? (or) would you still wear one?	If the District decides to make masks optional, are there any situations where masks should remain mandatory?
Staff	419	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes: 53% No: 32% Unsure: 15% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes: 43% No: 35% Unsure: 22% 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> In spaces that hold large indoor gatherings: 66% Mask should be optional at all times: 34%
Middle School/CHS Students	1,389	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes: 49% No: 35% Unsure: 16% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes: 47% No: 21% Unsure: 32% 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> In spaces that hold large indoor gatherings: 75% Mask should be optional at all times: 25%
Parent /Guardians	2,612	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes: 64% No: 25% Unsure: 11% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes: 28% No: 51% Unsure: 21% 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> In spaces that hold large indoor gatherings: 51% Mask should be optional at all times: 49%

We will continue to maintain a safe and thoughtful environment for all students and staff. We ask that everyone respect one another's decision, whether they choose to mask or not. In accordance with district policy, harassment, intimidation, and bullying will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Anyone, including staff or students, who wish to continue wearing a mask will be supported in their choice of doing so. We will encourage our teachers to have conversations with their students around respecting each other's personal choices.

We encourage parents to discuss your family's mask choice with your children, as staff will not be monitoring this. Please put an extra mask in your child's backpack for the times that they may need to wear them*. Disposable masks will still be available in the main office of each school building.

***Presently, we will continue to require/request masking:**

1. During large indoor gatherings including, but not limited to, assemblies, plays, art shows, concerts (strongly suggested)
2. For individuals who are returning to school after COVID-positive isolation on days 6-10 (mandatory)
3. As recommended by the DOH (i.e., significant increased transmission, outbreak)

As a reminder from our 2/22 communication (link: bit.ly/3h9d04g) one of the mitigating strategies to be discontinued when we shift to a "mask optional" environment is **contact tracing** by K-12 school nurses and administrators. Operationally and logistically, this NJDOH recommendation is no longer sustainable. This means:

1. Families and school communities would only receive a general notice if a laboratory confirmed COVID positive case is reported within their school community; and schools will no longer direct quarantining of unvaccinated close contacts (or entire classrooms);
2. Schools will no longer recommend quarantine after travel for unvaccinated individuals;
3. We will continue the practice of recommending isolation of COVID positive individuals and those with 'COVID-compatible' symptoms waiting for a test result;
4. Virtual learning will continue to be offered to students who are:
 - a. Unable to attend school in-person due to testing COVID-positive (or)
 - b. Who have COVID-compatible symptoms and are awaiting test results as well as household members of these individuals.
5. The school nurses will still be monitoring cases, in partnership with the local DOH who will investigate cases and notify the school district if there is an outbreak. Please continue to report positive COVID test results to your building principal and school nurse.

Please know that the health and safety of everyone in our school buildings is our top priority. As such, we are closely following the recommendations of our state and local health officials. As these recommendations change, we will adjust our health and safety protocols accordingly. It remains possible that we may need to re-implement our mask policy if the numbers of positive COVID-19 cases in our schools or community increase. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your child's building principal. As always, thank you for your support and understanding.

***Note for Preschool Community:** The mandates for PreK students differ from the K-12 school setting. As per New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) guidelines and in consensus from our local health departments, if a facility has a population of people that are ineligible for vaccination then masking stays in place as the only other prevention strategy to protect those who are vulnerable. If and when the NJDOH provides a revised guideline for this age group we will then reach out to PreK families with a similar survey. **Contact tracing will continue for the PreK community (for close contacts of an individual with a positive lab test).**

Sincerely,

South Orange & Maplewood School District