



School District Tips for Masking Deliberations and Communications

The New Jersey School Boards Association consulted with school district communication experts about how districts could best reach a decision and convey their masking policy decisions following Gov. Phil Murphy's announcement that the school mask mandate will be lifted March 7, 2022.

Important Considerations

- **Take a thoughtful approach:** Before making an announcement, make sure you have engaged in discussion with your community, educational stakeholders and board counsel.
- **Consult with medical experts:** School leaders may wish to consult with local medical professionals, school nurses, district doctor, and their county health department.
- **School districts get to decide:** Understand that the state school mask mandate ends March 7, which means that local districts may decide whether or not to require them. The governor has said that districts may not prohibit students and staff from wearing masks.
- **Not a one-size-fits-all approach:** What your neighboring community decides may not be the best decision for your school district...each community is different.
- **Keep it general:** Consider not pigeonholing your district with specific metrics for making masking policy decisions. Instead, make your explanation more general since a variety of factors could be considered to keep/drop/reinstate the policy in the future.
- **Be prepared:** Regardless of the district's decision, be prepared for the potential for differing opinions within the community.

Communication Tips and Phrases

Below are some tips and phrases districts could use in their communications explaining their decisions to the community.

Instituting a "mask optional" policy:

- On Feb. 7, Gov. Phil Murphy announced that the school mask mandate will no longer be in effect statewide as of March 7.
- Following dramatically declining COVID-19 transmission rates and deaths in New Jersey and our community...
- Considering the high vaccination rate among teachers, staff and administrators...
- Considering _____ percentage of the student population, ages 5 and older whom have been vaccinated, and knowing that younger students may be eligible soon...
- Knowing there are some in the community who would prefer to keep their masks on due to their specific needs and concerns, we are making masks optional effective March 7.
- Everyone should respect other's decisions, whether they choose to mask or not. In accordance with district policy, bullying will not be tolerated.
- It remains possible that the district may need to reinstate a mandatory mask policy, if the numbers of positive COVID-19 cases in our schools, locally or in area hospitals increase, or if outbreaks occur in our education community.

MORE

- Please note: This is subject to change based on the infection rates, the New Jersey Department of Health Communicable Disease COVID-19 weekly Activity Level Report (CALI index), governor's orders, and advice of local medical professionals.

Keeping the mask mandate in your district:

- On Feb. 7, Gov. Phil Murphy announced that the school mask mandate will no longer be in effect statewide as of March 7.
- In that same announcement, the governor also noted that local school districts can make determinations as to whether they should continue with mask mandates.
- The _____ district is making the decision to keep the school mask mandate based on:
 - ✓ Advice of local medical personnel.
 - ✓ Low vaccination rates among _____.
 - ✓ Overwhelming requests by the community to stay with masks for the time being.
- Following community trends, where localized outbreaks still are occurring...
- We will reassess the situation on a monthly basis, taking into account all factors and public input.

Statements Reassuring Families Concerning School Safety

- The district will maintain the COVID-19 enhanced cleaning/disinfection/ventilation procedures already in place.
- We look forward with hope that the vaccination rate in our community will continue to increase and that virus circulation will keep decreasing.
- We plan to open classroom windows for greater ventilation and give the students more outdoor time when weather permits.
- At present, we are awaiting specifics from state health and education officials concerning contact tracing and quarantining. In the meantime, it is important that parents continue to keep the school nurse notified of positive COVID-19 tests and symptoms.
- As we receive further guidance, we will keep the community informed.

Additional resources

- **Donovan Group**, a Wisconsin-headquartered national public relations firm, offers free templates for district messages including: [School COVID-19 Communication Resources and Templates](#). Among them, are template letters for "[Mask Requirement Removed](#)" and "[Mask Requirement Implemented](#)."

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