



**Harbor Springs
Public Schools**

Excellence in Character
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February 15, 2022

Dear HSPS Community:

On February 10, 2022 the Health Department of Northwest Michigan announced that the Health Order requiring masks for all K-12 students and in all school facilities will be rescinded as of 11:59 PM on February 17, 2022. Their decision, as noted in a recent press release, was based on the following:

- Ongoing weekly monitoring of pandemic risk indicators demonstrating weekly cases per 100,000 have decreased by 67% statewide over the past three weeks and decreased by 56% in the Traverse City Michigan Economic Recovery (MERC) region.
- While an increase in hospitalizations has typically followed a similar pattern as cases in previous surges, hospitalizations did rise but not as sharply as cases in the recent COVID-19 Omicron surge.
- Parents now have access to additional tools and strategies for mitigating risk of COVID-19 including widespread vaccination opportunities for school-age children, increasing availability of testing both at home and at community sites, broad access to effective masks and public health information for the general public.
- In general, due to the changing conditions of the pandemic, the public health response across local, state, and national agencies is shifting its focus from mandates and restrictions to individual personal protection responsibilities.

At our regularly scheduled Board of Education meeting on February 14, 2022, based on my recommendation, the Board unanimously approved that masks will no longer be required but recommended, in any Harbor Springs Public Schools indoor facility **beginning February 18, 2022**. The exception is on school buses where they will still be required by federal mandate. I also recommended to the Board of Education that contact tracing remain in place. Unvaccinated and unmasked close contacts of people who were positive, will have the opportunity to test daily to stay in school in lieu of quarantine. The District will continue to require individuals testing positive for COVID to isolate for 5 days from the date of positive test or symptom onset. They may return to school on day 6, but must wear a mask through day 10. It is vital that students and staff who display symptoms of any kind of illness stay home.

I realize that this decision will not please everybody in our school community. It has been two calendar years and portions of three school years that we have been dealing with COVID-19. I am proud that our District has been able to safely operate with as little disruption as possible. For over 1 ½ years, our students and staff have done their best to wear masks all day in school, as required. However, it has become more and more of a challenge to ensure that students wear their masks correctly – or have the kind of masks that the CDC recommends – respirators, N95 or similar, multiple layer cloth masks that fit tightly, etc. Because we now have other tools such as vaccination and testing available, I feel that no longer requiring masks is the best decision at this point in time. The District will watch things closely and will make any necessary adjustments to its plan if necessary.

The [Revised HSPS COVID Preparedness Plan](#), effective February 18, 2022, reflects these changes

Sincerely,

Michael Behrmann
Superintendent of Schools