

FACE COVERINGS

The Canton Public School District is committed to providing a safe environment in schools during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Maintaining a safe environment is critical to the District's ability to ensuring educational continuity via a full-time, in-person classroom learning experience.

According to public health experts, one of the best ways to stop the spread of coronavirus and to keep members of our school community safe is the use of face masks or face coverings. Therefore, using the guidance and recommendations from the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH), the District has established the following requirements which will remain in place until further notice.

CPS will require all students and all staff to wear masks and or face coverings with 2 or 3 layers that adequately cover both their nose and mouth, and are well-fitted to the individuals. Preschool students are strongly encouraged to wear masks. Some masks and/or face coverings are not appropriate for the school setting and include bandanas, gaiters (neck scarfs), masks with vents, and masks with inappropriate language in violation of the District dress code. For more information about appropriate mask use, please see: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/cloth-face-covering.pdf>

Per CDC guidance, individuals may be excused from the requirement for the following list of reasons. Specifically if the individual:

- has trouble breathing.
- is unconscious.
- is incapacitated.
- cannot remove the mask or face covering without assistance.

In addition, masks or face coverings will not be required for anyone who has a medical, behavioral or other challenge making it unsafe to wear a face mask or face covering. A written note from a physician is required for a requested exemption. Parents/guardians may not excuse their child from the face mask requirement by signing a waiver.

Exceptions to this policy under certain circumstances, such as for students with medical, behavioral or other challenges who are unable to wear masks, must be approved by the building principal in consultation with the school nurse or local Board of Health. Face shields or physical barriers may provide an alternative in some instances.

Additionally, face masks or face coverings will not be required when appropriate social distancing is enforced:

- during mask breaks.
- while eating or drinking.
- during physical education classes.

- while outside.

A student's mask or face covering is to be provided by the student's family. Staff members are responsible for providing their own face coverings. However, the District will supply disposable face covering for individuals who arrive at a building, or board school transportation, without one.

If students are in violation of this policy, the building principal will consult with the parent/guardians to determine whether an exception is appropriate, or the student may be removed from the school building for in-person learning until such time as they can comply with the requirement, or the requirement is lifted.

Violations of this policy by staff will be handled in the same manner as other violations of School Committee policy. Visitors in violation of this policy will be denied entry to the school/District facility.

After consulting with medical experts and state health officials, the Massachusetts Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education (Commissioner) has extended the mask requirement for public schools in Massachusetts through at least November 1, 2021. The Commissioner will revisit the requirement to revise it as warranted by public health data.

The School Committee will review this policy at the January 20, 2022, public meeting; this is the first regularly scheduled School Committee meeting following the January 15, 2022, date set by DESE/DPH and the Commissioner.

In conjunction with the DESE Policy on Vaccination Rate Threshold, as of October 15, 2021, if a school demonstrates a vaccination rate of 80 percent or more of all students and staff in the school through an attestation form submitted to DESE, then vaccinated individuals in that school would no longer be subject to the mask requirement. Mask-wearing will remain an individual option for the fully vaccinated. Whether or not a school or district avails themselves of the 80 percent vaccination off ramp is a local decision to be made by school and district leaders in consultation with local health officials.

In alignment with statewide guidance, unvaccinated students and staff would be required to continue wearing masks. Schools that seek approval to lift the mask requirement must submit an attestation form to DESE.

According to DESE, the following individuals must be included in the 80 percent count: students and "any staff member regularly providing in-school services" includes contracted staff (e.g., itinerant staff), individuals engaged to provide goods or services (e.g., student teachers/tutors, food service workers), part-time employees, non-student facing school-based staff (e.g., clerks), coaches, after-school staff, etc.

If a school within the District meets the 80 percent Vaccination Rate Threshold, this policy will be reviewed at the next regularly scheduled School Committee meeting to determine if and how the District will avail itself of the off ramp for the impacted school as described above.

This policy will remain in place until rescinded by the School Committee.

Guidance Statements:

Massachusetts Department of Public Health

<https://www.mass.gov/doc/updated-advisory-regarding-masks-and-face-coverings-july-30-2021-0/download>

Center for Disease Control and Prevention – Guidance for Covid-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools Updated August 5, 2021 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.htm>

Center for Disease Controls – Guidance for Covid-19 Prevention on Public Transportation
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/face-masks-public-transportation.html>

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education – Fall 2021 Covid-19 Guidance <https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/on-desktop/2021-0730fall-2021-covid19-guidance.pdf>

SOURCE: MASC – August 10, 2021

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