

For Immediate Release

January 25, 2022

Allegheny County Public Schools will temporarily sustain current COVID-19 mitigation protocols, including the requirement that students, staff and visitors wear masks while at school. Students are scheduled to return to school on Wednesday, January, 26, 2022, after a 2-day workday period from the division's regular academic calendar. The school division has been successful providing in-person learning and improving classroom coverage with the current mitigation strategies in place.

Since Governor Glenn Youngkin issued Executive Order No. 2 on January 15, 2022, the school division has been involved in numerous discussions on how to proceed with updated guidance regarding the masking of students in our schools. These discussions have included attention to SB1303, which contains CDC mitigation language. Additionally, lawsuits have been filed with various courts seeking clarification on whether the Governor's executive order can alter a common interpretation of existing state law, specifically SB1303.

Given the circumstances, Allegheny County Public Schools based its decision to continue with the masking requirement on the following considerations:

1. Virginia Department of Health and U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines on masking have not changed. The VDH and the CDC continue to recommend a layered approach to COVID mitigation, including the wearing of masks.
2. Current data from the Roanoke City and Allegheny Health Districts show the community COVID-19 transmission rate in our area remains high due to Omicron variant of the virus.
3. Lifting the masking requirement will likely increase the number of students and staff being quarantined and isolated. Universal masking is allowing ACPS to reduce quarantine and isolation times. Most recently, the school division has been following 5-day quarantine/isolation guidelines as recommended by the VDH and CDC.
4. COVID vaccination rates among persons 5-17 in Allegheny County remain low. In the 5-11 age range, 6.8 percent of children have been fully vaccinated. The vaccination rate for persons aged 12-17 is 27.8 percent. These numbers are based on data posted on the VDH's website as of Tuesday, January, 25, 2022.

The top priority of Allegheny County Public schools is to provide our students with a high standard of in-person learning in a healthy and safe environment. Our decision is made with the goal of safeguarding the health of all individuals in our buildings. Every school division is trying to determine the best path given the current information before them in a highly-fluid situation. As per typical practice in our school division, an interdisciplinary health mitigation team helped provide our recommendation.

We at ACPS know that than not everyone will agree with this decision, but we ask for the community's patience and understanding as we do what we believe is best in the interest of our students, staff, and their families. This current practice may change as we receive more guidance and clarification. The school board is scheduled to meet on Monday, February 7, 2022, and the board will revisit the issue based on the most current information it will have at that time.

“We know the past 24 months have presented us all with so many challenges and so much information. We thank our community for their help and support, even when all of us may view things a little differently, and we look forward to continued clarification and discussion. Please join us in thanking our staff for their hard work during this time,” shared Superintendent Kim Halterman.

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