



James A. Fazzino, Ed. D.  
*Interim Superintendent*

February 25, 2022

Dear MCSSSD family:

Recently, Governor Murphy announced that the statewide mandate for all students and staff in schools to wear face masks at all times would end, effective March 7, 2022. At that time, individual school districts will be allowed to make their own decisions regarding whether face masks must still be worn in their schools, and if so then who must wear them and under what circumstances.

The Governor is ending the statewide mask mandate based on his assessment of current COVID-19 vaccination, infection and transmission data, as well as the recent downward trend line of that data. As has been the case for the better part of the last year, our state and our local communities have reported high percentages of vaccination rates against COVID-19 infection, and high percentages of people being boosted when eligible. According to reports from the New Jersey Department of Health (“NJDOH”), the current COVID-19 situation is encouraging enough that it is reasonable to consider whether some protocols we have lived with over the last two years can be safely relaxed to a degree.

Universal mask wearing has been a component of a larger set of protections (such as social distancing and diligent facilities cleaning and disinfecting) that we have implemented to keep our staff and students safe, and our school buildings open and operating. Those protections have been a helpful reassurance for staff and parents who are concerned about exposure to COVID-19. By the same token, it is undeniable that for many staff and students wearing a mask all day has been a burden contributing to the pervasive feeling of “COVID fatigue” we are all experiencing.

The available data, as well as decisions that are being made by school districts and agencies around us in the county, throughout New Jersey and nationally, all suggest that now is a good time for us to move to a “mask optional” rule at the same time the statewide mandate ends on March 7<sup>th</sup>. Everyone should be clear that this decision is and will remain subject to change in the event that public health data takes a turn for the worse. No administrative rule can “declare an end to COVID”. We must be guided by the credible information we are presented with about infections, transmission and mitigation. Our decision-making has been based on this since March 2020 and it will continue to be so.

Everyone should also be clear that our decision to end our mask mandate on March 7<sup>th</sup> does not mean that face masks will no longer be seen in our schools. It simply means that staff, students, and parents/guardians will make their own choices about whether, and under what

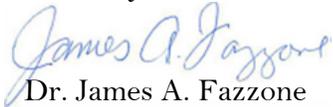
circumstances, to wear face masks. Our schools and administrative buildings will also continue adhering to social distancing and cleaning protocols that have been in place since the pandemic began. As weather gets warmer, we will take advantage of increasing opportunities to open windows again, and be outside again, as much as possible.

Please be aware that while the Governor has decided to end the state's universal mask mandate in schools, the mask mandate will remain in place for all students and staff travelling in school busses and other school vehicles (except in cases where students are unable to wear face masks at all). If this **Federal** mandate changes in the future, we will inform everyone as quickly as possible.

Transitioning away from a universal mandate in our schools can be challenging because each of us is being given the opportunity to make our own "rules". I want to make clear to everyone the expectation that individual choices will be respected by others. Respect for reasonable choices made by others that are different from the choices we make for ourselves is an essential cornerstone of our ability to live together as a community. I expect all staff, all students, and all parents to treat each other with understanding, support, and respect as we move through every phase of transition related to COVID-19. We have done a remarkable job as a school community working together over the last two years. It will require a conscious effort on each of our parts to remain a community that focuses on common goals as we make individual choices. I have confidence that we will be able to do this now, as we have done so well in the past.

Enjoy the warmer days to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James A. Fazzone". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. James A. Fazzone  
Interim Superintendent