From: **ED, Secretary of Ed Res Acct** <ra-educationsecretary@pa.gov>
Date: Tue, Aug 31, 2021 at 1:46 PM
Subject: Acting Secretary of Health Order: Face Coverings in School Entities
To:

Dear Colleague,

Later today, I will join Governor Wolf and other state leaders to announce an [Order signed by Pennsylvania’s Acting Secretary of Health requiring face coverings to be worn in all school entities](https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/Documents/Diseases%20and%20Conditions/Order%20of%20the%20Acting%20Secretary%20Directing%20Face%20Coverings%20in%20Schools.pdf), including school districts, brick and mortar and cyber charter schools, private and parochial schools, career and technical centers, intermediate units, and early learning and other child care settings, **effective Tuesday, September 7, 2021**. This statewide Order reflects the current statewide data—all 67 counties are reporting high or substantial rates of community transmission of COVID-19—and the fact that our young people represent the largest remaining segment of our population that is unvaccinated, and therefore unprotected from an infectious disease variant that is aggressively spreading.

Your efforts to maintain orderly and safe school conditions, foster consistency for your students, and navigate divergent community sentiment have been heroic. Amid these challenges, I am heartened by the fact that nearly everyone—parents, policymakers, medical professionals, and educators—agrees that our students’ long-term prospects depend on schools remaining open for full-time instruction for every family that wants it. This Order will help maximize the chances for regular school operations and minimize student and staff quarantines as the school year gets underway. The Order also acknowledges that face covering requirements can’t go on forever. The Administration will continue to evaluate community transmission rates, vaccination data, and other indicators, and will provide a comprehensive update to the education community by October 1, 2021, to inform decisions about the Order’s statewide application going ahead.

To ensure as much consistency as possible, local implementation of the Order will reflect many of the standards that were in place throughout much of the 2020-21 school year, including a series of [accommodations and exceptions detailed within the Order](https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/Documents/Diseases%20and%20Conditions/Order%20of%20the%20Acting%20Secretary%20Directing%20Face%20Coverings%20in%20Schools.pdf%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank). [Answers to FAQs are also available on the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s website](https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/SchoolReopeningGuidance/ReopeningPreKto12/MaskingOrder/Pages/default.aspx). In a change from the 2020 Order and recognizing a steady accrual of evidence around disease transmission, face coverings are not required outdoors.

I recognize this announcement will be met with relief in some quarters and anger in others. I further understand that proponents and opponents alike will feel frustration that it comes as the school year is already underway in large portions of the state. The last few weeks have been an exceedingly discouraging and disruptive chapter in the course of the pandemic, especially the manner in which weak mitigation efforts in other states have threatened the relative normalcy that Pennsylvanians sacrificed so much to achieve. As we work to regain ground through increased availability of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines for our students, efficient administration of Federal aid, and continued mitigation efforts, please know how much your leadership matters to Pennsylvania’s families.

Sincerely,
Noe

**Noe Ortega**| Secretary of Education

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