

PINE PLAINS CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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June 6, 2021

Dear Parents and Guardians:

The situation regarding the mandate for face masks for students and staff requires that I contact you today.

A brief review of the timeline is in order. With no prior notice, this past Friday afternoon, the NY State Department of Health released a letter sent by the Commissioner of Health, Dr. Howard Zucker to Dr. Rochelle Walensky, Director of the Center for Disease Control (CDC). In the letter Dr. Zucker said that New York planned to relax the mask mandate in schools unless they heard from the CDC that there were reasons not to do so. I have attached a copy of the [Zucker](#) letter.

The news media reported that this change was to be implemented Monday, June 7th raising expectations of parents, staff and honestly administrators as well. I should note that the school districts were never contacted about this proposal. I learned of the letter on internet news sources. I received a copy of the letter from one of our parents and later from the County Executive's office.

No one was certain as to the status of the mask mandate until this afternoon at 1:30 pm when superintendents were sent a memo from the [NY State Education Department](#) stating that there had been no change to the mask mandate and that it would remain in effect "until further notice". I have also attached a copy of this memo to this letter.

This directive essentially removes any discretion I might have had in the enforcement of the mask requirement. However, given the forecasted hot and humid temperatures this week I am directing that the school staff give extended and numerous mask breaks to students. Further, water is to be made available to all students on request. Finally we will follow the NY Athletic Association guidelines for outdoor activities in high heat and humidity situations. Therefore if the heat index approaches 96 degrees as it is expected to do, outside activities like recess and outdoor physical education will be suspended.

I can honestly say that in 34 years as a school superintendent I cannot recall a more poorly executed set of actions from Albany than what we have experienced this weekend. I do not have the authority to suspend the mask mandate despite what parents have suggested. I will do everything that I can to protect the health and safety

of our students. If we get any additional instructions I will immediately forward them to you.

Thank you for your past cooperation and I ask for your continued patience.

Sincerely,
Dr. Martin D. Handler
Superintendent