

PINE PLAINS CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Dear Parents and Guardians:

I am writing to give you an update on yesterday's letter.

When we received the NY State Department of Health guidance it stated that all people in schools would be required to wear masks at all times unless eating, drinking, playing an instrument or singing. I communicated in yesterday's letter that it appeared that "mask breaks" would not be allowed.

It is clear from the response from parents that this was a matter of serious concern and many asked that we reconsider. I have looked carefully at the guidance. It does not specifically prohibit mask breaks. It is my position that short, periodic mask breaks would not violate the intent of this directive to have students in masks. In addition, I looked at our record of no in-school infections during the last school year while we gave the students periodic mask breaks and felt we could continue the practice.

Because of these factors, I am going to allow staff to give short mask breaks as we did last school year. I do have one word of caution; if there is a positive case in a school setting, the use of mask breaks may mean that the students involved would have to be quarantined. This is in contrast to an outbreak where all students are consistently masked. In that situation, none of the other students would have to be quarantined. When a mask break is offered to your child, they may take it or opt not to as needed.

One other update - Yesterday the NYS Health Department issued a directive that required all school staff to be tested for COVID at least once a week. Staff may be exempt from the testing if they provided the school district proof of full vaccination. We will also be required to offer testing to unvaccinated students. Testing of students will require parent consent as it has in the past.

Finally, I want to emphasize once again that if your student shows any of the symptoms in the health screener that you keep them home from school. Please contact the main office of your student's school if you are experiencing difficulty with the health screener. Your cooperation will be critical in our ability to keep the school open for in-person learning.

Be well and stay safe.

Dr. Martin D. Handler
Superintendent