

MCS Family Update - October 14, 2021

Dear MCS Families,

Effective Saturday, October 16, masks will again be optional for students and staff in school buildings and on school buses. This email provides the rationale and additional considerations relevant to this decision.

Rationale

Since early September, we've seen a significant decline in the positivity rate in Cobb County and a continued local decline in COVID cases for school-aged children, which have dropped even more dramatically than other age groups. We have seen the same decline in our MCS student and staff data, confirming that we now have less cases of COVID walking in our school doors.

Throughout this pandemic, we've strived to achieve the appropriate balance between our instructional needs and public health protocols. MCS has been progressive in our safety mitigation strategies, which include being one of the first school districts in Georgia to implement the "test-and-stay" model that allows students to return to school during a quarantine after daily rapid antigen testing. The decision to transition to mask-optional is one more step in establishing some degree of normalcy in our schools, as the data indicates conditions have changed significantly from the start of the school year.

On a personal level, I understand that some of you will read this email and be frustrated, or even angered, by this transition in our protocols, while others will be delighted and relieved. I ask for your continued grace with me and with each other. Nothing about a pandemic is static – our district's response will continue to evolve as both this virus and the data evolve.

Additional Considerations

As we make this transition, the following considerations are relevant for all MCS families and staff:

- **Contact Tracing:** In the event we are notified of a positive case, MCS will continue to contact trace and follow the recommended 7-day and 10-day quarantine protocols. In contact tracing, six feet will be used for close contacts who are unmasked and indoors.
- **Test-and-Stay:** Any student or staff member who is identified as a school-based close contact and remains asymptomatic will have the option to participate in "test-and-stay", thereby allowing that person to attend school following a

negative rapid antigen test. A student or staff member participating in “test-and-stay” will be required to wear a mask each school day of the 7-day quarantine.

- MHS Homecoming Dance: For those high school students who plan to attend the Homecoming dance this Saturday, masks are optional.
- School Volunteers: MCS will continue the current protocol of limiting non-staff volunteers in schools during the school day. At the discretion of the principal, volunteers may be allowed to enter the school and work in an isolated location away from students and staff. My hope is to welcome families back in our schools as soon as possible; this protocol will be updated as community transmission numbers continue to decline.
- School Conference Week: In the coming weeks, some families in our elementary and middle grades will have teacher conferences. In consideration for our teachers, masks will be required for all in-person conferences inside the school building. If a teacher prefers to conduct the meeting outside, there is no expectation to wear a mask. Should a family prefer to shift the conference to virtual, please contact your child’s teacher(s).
- School Field Trips: It is possible that a destination for an MCS-approved field trip may have different COVID-related protocols, such as a mask requirement or otherwise. MCS will honor such protocols and ensure that all students and families are aware in advance of specific expectations.
- COVID Testing: In addition to the “test-and-stay” rapid antigen tests, MCS will continue to offer [PCR testing](#) Monday-Friday at Lemon Street. Further, we have been notified by the Georgia Department of Public Health that weekly surveillance testing will start in the coming weeks for those families who opted into the program. If you have already completed the consent forms for your child(ren), you will be contacted via email with additional details. If you did not previously complete the consent but would like to do such now, please [register through this link](#).
- Vaccinations: We were advised by Cobb & Douglas Public Health that vaccinations for younger students (ages 5-11) may be approved under the [Emergency Use Authorization by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration \(FDA\)](#) on October 26, 2021. Also, we are waiting for additional guidance regarding booster shots for those 12 and older. As we have done in the past, we are collaborating with Poole’s Pharmacy and will be prepared to assist those in our community who have an interest in the vaccine. Additional details will be provided in the coming days.

While no one can be certain of the future of this pandemic and the COVID virus, numerous epidemiologists and medical experts with whom I collaborate are hopeful that we will not have a third surge. My sincere hope is a MCS mask mandate will not return in our future; however, please know that we will continue to be responsive to the data.

In closing, I thank each of you for your patience and grace as we continue to evolve through this pandemic.

Sincerely,
Grant

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