



School Union 69
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May 20, 2021

Dear School Union #69 Families,

We have received inquiries from families regarding the latest guidance from the US CDC, Maine CDC and Maine DOE around distancing and mask wearing in the community and in schools. While changes in masking requirements and distancing have been changing recently, the Maine DOE sent out an updated guidance in schools on Friday evening, May 14th. We have been reading through and discussing the guidance and asking questions in our meetings with the state to get as clear as we can about the DOE's expectations. In this update, I hope to:

1. to explain the decision making process we have used all year to make changes to the learning plans created in response to the pandemic.
2. to provide you with some context about when/how you might hear from your school if changes were to be made.

First, the process. Throughout the year, decisions regarding the health and safety of students and staff in response to the pandemic have been made by a specific team of staff, administrators and community members at each school. Often, these were the already long-established Health and Safety teams that met, before this year, once or twice a year to update safety protocols. This year, most of those teams have met at least monthly to review our safety protocols in light of the ever-changing nature of the pandemic. The process has been, and will continue to be, that all new information or changes are reviewed and discussed by this team, either in meetings or via email. This way, we ensure that a variety of perspectives are considered with each change and that we are adhering to the state and federal guidelines. This situation is no different. The teams will carefully review the new guidelines presented by the Department of Education and make recommendations that work for each school community.

In the latest guidance, the MCDC and MDOE have removed any requirement to mask or socially distance outdoors. **To be clear, this only applies outside. In the school buildings, during arrival and dismissal, as well as on buses, masks are still required.** The DOE has left it up to districts and schools to determine, based on their situation, whether or not to maintain some masking outdoors. We are still required to trace close contacts of positive cases in schools and cohorting is still recommended. What protocols are necessary, how and when masks can be removed, and how to make sure families and students understand these changes, is what the Health and Safety Team at your school is in the process of working out. Those meetings are scheduled and you should hear about any changes at your school no later than Thursday, May 27th. We have had great success managing this pandemic with care and attention, and we will do the same in this case.

As always, we appreciate your support as we continue to weigh health and safety in light of the pandemic with the well being and academic success for the students in our care.

Warmly,

Kate