

August 18, 2021

Dear Canton Families and Staff,

In a very short time, we will experience the great excitement and energy of a new school year. Simply enjoying our students and staff in the summer programming continually reaffirms to me the importance of school and the special nature of its start.

After last year, there is a universal desire and unwavering commitment to make in-person, high-quality learning the top priority. Our District's ability to engage in best practices that drive high achievement, healthy social interaction, and overall joy is at the heart of everyone's hopes for this year.

Yet, as we enter the school year with true optimism, a safe and healthy environment is also paramount to achieve education continuity, especially as COVID-19 cases rise, the Delta variant emerges, and many variables demand our consideration. *Preserving in-person learning is key as there is no remote option this year.*

In consideration of these educational goals and conversations with local safety officials, and recognizing the importance of a clear and consistent message for a strong opening, I recommended that we require masks for adults and students across all grade levels to start the year. After discussion, the Canton School Committee approved (4-1) a Face Coverings policy that requires masks for all students and adults -- vaccinated and unvaccinated -- at the start of the year.

Many share different perspectives on masks, and understandably so. I think there is general frustration that they are re-emerging in our lives. But as we considered them, masks emerged as an overture -- a key mitigation strategy -- that will allow our students and staff to engage in important educational activities, such as small group workshops and discussions, class collaboration, peer and teacher conferencing, social interactions, and play.

As a school community, we are committed to constantly analyzing the COVID data, the vaccination rates, and the school experience as we revisit this policy. The School Committee set the October 7, 2021 meeting as the next time to review the [Face Covering policy](#).

Implementation

On behalf of the School District, I want to share some details for clarification around implementation.

1. **Criteria for Masks** -- Our mask criteria and expectations have not changed from last year. By exercising Policy EBC Supplemental, I added our existing mask criteria language to the adopted Face Coverings policy to ensure clarity and adherence to CDC and local safety guidance for masks. *CPS will require all students and all staff to wear*

masks and or face coverings with 2 or 3 layers that adequately cover both their nose and mouth. Some masks and/or face coverings are not appropriate for the school setting and include bandanas, gaiters (neck scarfs), masks with vents, and masks with inappropriate language in violation of the District dress code.

2. **Outside** -- Staff, students and parents/guardians are not required to wear masks outside. This stance applies to those who are vaccinated and not vaccinated. Outside is widely regarded as a safe area. Unvaccinated individuals are encouraged to wear masks, but it is not required. This approach is how we ended the year and operated over the summer.
3. **Lunches** -- Students may remove their masks during lunch, and we are making provisions at all of the grade levels to lower the number of students in the cafeteria, achieve a measure of social distancing, and to use outdoor spaces as much as possible. Principals are finalizing their plans for lunch and they will be communicating the details prior to the start of school.
4. **Physical Education** -- The majority of physical education classes will be outside to start the year, so masks will not be required. Physical education classes held indoors will require masking to start the year. This expectation will be revisited in October.
5. **Bus/Transportation** -- In alignment with the state mandate, masks must be worn on buses and transportation at all times. The windows will be open as well.
6. **Visitors** -- Visitors will be allowed to enter the building this year. Visitors must follow the Face Covering Policy when entering the building.
7. **Mask Breaks** -- School administration and educators will build in mask breaks as they did last year.
8. **Mitigation Strategies** -- Canton Public Schools will continue to implement a series of mitigation strategies to ensure a safe and healthy environment.
 - Air purifiers will be placed in every room, including common spaces
 - Air quality tests will be conducted quarterly
 - Windows will be opened (student allergies will be considered)
 - Outdoor tents will return
 - Enhanced cleaning will be conducted twice a week at night
 - Daily self screening (The screening will be home based vs a Google Form. More information will be forthcoming)
 - Pooled testing (plus the new Symptomatic Testing and Test and Stay Program)
 - The COVID-19 Data Dashboard will return
 - PPE will be available, including extra masks
 - Hand Hygiene will be encouraged

- Vaccination Clinics will be hosted on site
9. [COVID-19 Response Protocols](#) -- The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) recently released this year's [COVID-19 Response Protocols](#). Families and staff are encouraged to review them. Since they are complex, we are working to develop flow charts and infographics so they can be better understood by all. You will see there is significant value associated with getting vaccinated and engaging in the testing opportunities. There will be many questions about Test and Stay and other scenarios. We will follow up with FAQs and many other modes of communication to keep you informed.

I hope you found this document helpful as a resource for information, details and clarity. As I stated at the School Committee meeting, I do not want decisions and debate to divide us. We all want the best for our students and we want them to have an amazing start to the year. We can expect so much to be fluid this year, but our commitment to our educational goals and overall excellence will remain constant.

As always, thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Derek Folan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Derek" and last name "Folan" clearly distinguishable.

Derek Folan
Interim Superintendent