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REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 1
Canaan, Cornwall, Kent, North Canaan, Salisbury and Sharon

Changes to School COVID-19 Safety Practices

February 24, 2022

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Introduction

A Message from the Superintendent of Schools

Nearly two years after all Connecticut schools and businesses were closed due to the rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus, legislators as well as public health and education officials have recently advised the Connecticut general public that it is safe and advisable to consider moving away from the more restrictive health and safety practices associated with the mitigation of COVID-19. At a meeting with Superintendents on Friday, February 18th, Dr. Manisha Juthani, The Commissioner of the CT Department of Public Health, indicated that virus trends were rapidly decreasing and expected to continue to do so. This diminishing number of COVID cases (resulting in much lower hospitalization rates) combined with the availability of vaccines and COVID-19 treatments has reduced the need for State-wide universal controls with respect to the spread of COVID-19. However, Dr. Juthani acknowledged that local municipalities and organizations (i.e., school systems) could experience periodic outbreaks or community spread of COVID-19 and indicated the need to address these issues, but at the local level.

This document describes the new guidelines for CT schools, developed by the CT DPH and endorsed by the Connecticut State Department of Education in response to recent changes in CT legislation. The guidelines have been adapted to the needs of the Region 1 school district and will go into effect on the morning of **March 1, 2022**.

The media has highlighted the elimination of a universal mask mandate in exchange for a mask-optional practice as the most significant adjustment to current public health safety practices. However the new recommended changes also drop requirements for social distancing and contact tracing in our schools. This is a major change and one that all staff and parents/caregivers should understand. **Please note that the guidelines also indicate that school districts may return to more restrictive safety measures, including a mask mandate, if local or broader community public health conditions change in the future.**

Per past practice, the new guidelines have been written to provide continuity of operations for all Region 1 schools. Specific implementation practices will be determined by each Principal in collaboration with teachers, staff and local Boards of Education. We thank everyone involved in this work for their thoughtfulness, flexibility and patience.

We hope that these new guidelines truly mark the change in our ability to live safely with COVID-19. Many thanks to all parents/caregivers, staff, students and Board of Education members for continuing to work together as we make our way through this challenging situation.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

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Lisa B. Carter
Superintendent

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Region 1 Mask Mandate Transition Plan - Table of Contents

PART 1 - Health and Safety Strategies

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Region One Priorities

Region One Schools have confirmed the four priority areas that will continue to remain in place for the rest of the school year..

	<p>Safety of Students and Staff</p> <p>Schools will be prepared to reinforce healthy practices among our staff and students, take preventative actions to prevent the spread of all respiratory illnesses, and prepare for any increased cases of COVID-19.</p>
	<p>A Flexible and Equitable Approach to Education</p> <p>Schools will remain open for in-person learning, while making some modifications to COVID-19 mitigation practices. However, Region One will be prepared to transition to former mitigation practices that will allow our students to continue to learn at high levels should the public health situation change.</p>
	<p>Attention to Social and Emotional Well-Being for All</p> <p>Schools will continue to operate with the understanding that the COVID-19 pandemic has created a wide variety of traumatic experiences and varied levels of stress for staff, students and families. Region One educators will have access to professional learning and support to help them to practice self-care and to meet the social and emotional needs of our students and their families.</p>
	<p>Strive to Meet Grade Level Achievement Expectations</p> <p>Curriculum, instruction and assessment will be monitored at the local and regional levels to provide the support needed to ensure continuity of practice appropriate to the setting in which learning will occur. Region One educators will continue to closely monitor student performance using multiple data sources to provide opportunities for students to achieve the expectations outlined in our curricula.</p>

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State of Connecticut Guidelines and Expectations

Connecticut public health officials, legislators and educators have been engaged in developing plans to support a safe approach to daily life in the aftermath of the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Their collaborative efforts have resulted in the following actions:

- On Monday, February 7, 2022, Governor Ned Lamont announced a plan to eliminate the statewide requirement that is in effect as part of Connecticut's COVID-19 safety protocols for masks to be worn in all schools and childcare centers effective Monday, February 28, 2022.
- On February 14th, the Senate voted to extend eleven Executive Orders, including the State-wide mask mandate, until June 30. However, the vote gave the Governor the power to rescind the mask mandate, but he cannot do so before February 28, 2022.
- On Friday, February 18, The CT Department of Public Health in collaboration with the Connecticut State Department of Education released two documents:
 - [Transitioning to a Model of Routine Respiratory Disease Prevention and Enhanced Outbreak Management and Control for COVID-19 in PreK-12 School Settings](#). This document states that, “effective February 28, 2022 our communities can begin to transition the management of COVID-19 in schools from a pandemic emergency response model toward a model that aligns with a more standard public health approach to the management and control of respiratory viral diseases (e.g., influenza). **The document includes significant revisions to many COVID-19 mitigation practices, including removing the requirement of mask and face coverings for students and staff while the school operates according to the recommended “routine disease prevention model”.**
 - [Considerations for Boards of Education, District Administrators, and other Local Decision-Makers Regarding Potential Changes to School COVID-19 Policies and Practices](#). The Superintendent has discussed the questions proposed in this document with the staff at the Torrington Area Health District as well as with other Litchfield County Superintendents. In addition, all Region 1 administrators have worked with the Region 1 Medical Advisor and school nurses to address the questions with respect to the needs of each school. The most current data used to evaluate the situation in Region 1 is contained in the document entitled [Shifting to a New COVID-19 Management Model](#).

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Keeping Our Schools Safe



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Consistent with the guidance from the Connecticut State Department of Education, as Region One schools plan to address the revised health and safety protocols, the guidance and considerations outlined in this document are grounded in five guiding principles:

1. Safeguarding the health and safety of students and staff.
2. Monitoring the school, students, and staff and, when necessary, taking appropriate action to control potential virus spread.
3. Emphasizing equity, access, and support to all students and communities.
4. Fostering strong two-way communication with partners such as families, educators, and staff.
5. Considering the continuing challenges to the physical safety, social emotional well-being, and the mental health needs of our students.

Region One Schools will rely on the continuing cooperation of families, students, and staff members to remain safe while in school.

Families play a critical role in supporting the new culture of health and safety that each of our schools will establish. Most importantly, families can help mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 in our schools by **checking their children daily for any COVID-19 symptoms and keeping them home from school when they are sick or have had close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19.** Families can also contribute by communicating concerns with teachers and school leaders, and continuing to follow state guidance on health and safety outside of school.

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Continuing COVID-19 Mitigation Practices

All Region One staff and students will continue to follow the practices noted below to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

	<p>Stay home when you feel ill.</p> <p>Students and staff must stay home if they are feeling sick, have any symptoms consistent with COVID-19, or have had close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19. Students and staff should follow the updated Region 1 Safety Protocols should they test positive for COVID-19. Students or staff who come to school with COVID-like symptoms or who develop symptoms during the school day will be sent home. They can return to school after proof of a negative COVID -19 test result.</p>
	<p>Face coverings</p> <p>Face masks are acknowledged to be a proven mitigation strategy to effectively prevent the spread of COVID-19. Thus, it is recommended that staff and students wear masks during the school day; however, masks are not required.</p>
	<p>Frequent hand washing or hand sanitizing expected.</p> <p>Staff and students will engage in frequent hand washing or sanitizing upon arrival, before and after meals, after bathroom use, and after coughing or sneezing. Hand sanitizers will continue to be available throughout each school building, in classrooms, and other common areas.</p>
	<p>Clean and Well-Ventilated Facilities</p> <p>Schools will continue to follow cleaning guidelines and will ensure that HVAC systems provide adequate air circulation or that fans are used to improve air circulation in each classroom.</p>
	<p>Diagnostic Screening and Testing</p> <p>Region 1 schools will continue to provide access to diagnostic screening and testing for COVID-19.</p>
	<p>Access to Vaccination</p> <p>The Superintendent will work with the CSDE and the Torrington Area Health District to continue to provide information about and access to vaccination clinics as needed throughout the duration of the pandemic.</p>

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Mask/Face Covering Practices



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One of the most significant changes to the current COVID-19 health and safety practices includes the ability to **make masks optional** as part of the “routine disease prevention model” as described by the CT Department of Public Health. As long as the local public health conditions support the implementation of “a more standard public health approach to the management and control of respiratory diseases,” students and staff will follow the practices noted below with respect to wearing masks or face coverings. However, should a local or Regional COVID-19 outbreak occur in any of the Region 1 schools/classrooms, or should conditions worsen with respect to COVID-19 transmission conditions within communities or surrounding areas, the Superintendent will work with Principals, the Region 1 Medical Advisor and the staff at the Torrington Area Health and Sharon Health Districts to take corrective action. At such times, it may be necessary to reinstate the use of masks and other mitigation practices to suppress the outbreak to to control the spread of COVID-19.

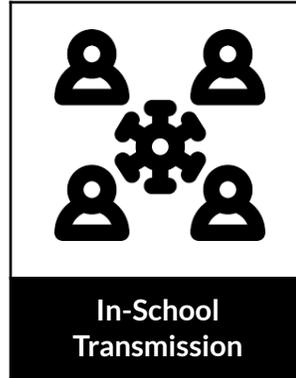
Mask Wearing Protocols

Masks and/or face coverings are **recommended**, but are **optional** for students and staff when in the school building.

- Schools will continue to have a supply of masks available for those who need them.
- Staff will **not** be monitoring students who are sent to school with masks. Students and their parents/caregivers will be responsible for their own choices.
- It is expected that masked and unmasked individuals will treat each other with respect.

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COVID-19 Cases in School



If a student or staff member has a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19, the School Nurse will continue to notify the building Principal and the Region 1 Central Office. In all cases, everyone involved will maintain confidentiality in accordance with FERPA, privacy expectations, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

The Superintendent of Schools will continue to report all cases to the CT Department of Public Health via the COVID-19 reporting portal. The Region 1 Central Office staff will continue to update the Region 1 website daily to report new cases for each school.

Should there be a COVID-19 outbreak in any Region 1 school, the Superintendent will work with TAHD, SHD, CSDE and the Region 1 Medical Advisor to determine the need to close a school and/or return to universal mask wearing and the implementation of other COVID-19 mitigation practices for all students and staff.

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Health and Safety Requirements

1. Health and Wellness

Elements of a Routine Disease Prevention Model

According to the February 18, 2022 guidance issued by the CT DPH, during times when available COVID-19 data indicate that local conditions are improving and the risk of COVID-19 transmission in the community and schools is generally stable at a relatively low level, DPH advises that school districts may wish to transition to a routine disease prevention model for managing COVID-19 risk in their PreK-12 schools.

Routine strategies for COVID-19 prevention include:

- **Recommending [COVID-19 vaccination](#)** for all eligible students and staff, including [booster vaccine doses](#) when appropriate.
- **Supporting** students and staff who choose to continue wearing a mask even when school policies do not require their use.
- **Following [Region 1 Safety Protocols](#)** for students and staff who have symptoms associated with, or have tested positive for, COVID-19.
 - Recommending **COVID-19 transmission prevention strategies**, including testing (self-testing and/or at provider sites) for students and staff, **following illness or exposures** to COVID-19 cases.
- Continuing to advise parents to report all cases of COVID-19 to the school and subsequently, the Superintendent continues to report identified cases to the local health department and the Connecticut Department of Public Health. The Region 1 Central Office staff will continue to update the Region 1 website daily to report new cases for each school.
- Being prepared to **respond quickly to rapid increases in cases** or clusters of cases in schools (including increases in absenteeism due to respiratory illness) as described below.

Per CT DPH, strategies that would generally **not** be included in routine COVID-19 prevention include:

- Individual case investigation and contact tracing.
- Quarantine of students and staff with in-school or other lower risk (e.g., short duration, low intensity) close contact exposures.

Face Masks and Personal Protection

1. Masks and/or face coverings are **recommended**, but are **optional** for students and staff when in the school building.
 - a. Schools will continue to have a supply of masks available for those who need them
2. Region One will ensure that face shields are available on-site for students or staff who may need one due to assignment.
3. **Staff will not be monitoring students who are sent to school with masks.** Students and their caregivers will be responsible for their own choices.
4. Students who have cloth masks that become dirty will be provided with a new mask and, through the nurse's office, will bag the cloth masks to transport home for cleaning.
5. **It is expected that masked and unmasked individuals will treat each other with respect.**

Health Guidance – Symptoms, Testing and Containment

1. Staying home from or leaving school:
 - a. Students and staff must inform the school if they are sick with COVID-19 related symptoms, particularly if they had a known contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 and have also had contact with the school population. They must stay home when they are sick, especially if they have COVID-19 symptoms such as fever and cough.
 - b. The Principal and/or the school nurse will receive reporting about all absences.
 - c. Each school will maintain all information about employee or student illness as a confidential medical record.
2. Students who exhibit COVID-like symptoms, while in school, should report to the nurse immediately to be screened and then be separated from other students until a parent or guardian arrives. When conducting screening, the nurse will follow these protocols:
 - i. Use touchless or disposable (preferred) or oral thermometers with single-use disposable covers or adequate disinfection between individual uses.
 - ii. The health screener must wear a face mask and face shield while performing this action.
3. Follow the [Region 1 Safety Protocols](#) if an individual has signs or symptoms of COVID-19, there is a known exposure, or a member of the school community has a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19.
4. Testing and Screening - PCR testing is available at no cost to schools
 - a. Grades K-12 - students
 - b. CSDE/DPH provided
 - c. Weekly testing by independent laboratory
 - d. Parental consent required
 - e. Screening for positive asymptomatic cases only

2. Visitors

Visitors

1. Visitors will be allowed in buildings as long as the school remains in a “routine prevention control model.”
2. In the event of a school/classroom-based outbreak or worsening conditions for general transmission in a local community or surrounding area, visitor guidelines will become restricted per the advice of the Region 1 Medical Advisor and the staff at TAHD and SHD.

3. Transportation

School Bus Requirements

1. **Bus Transportation -**
 - a. Bus transportation can operate up to full capacity with face coverings/masks **optional** for all students
 - b. School principals will collaborate with All Star Transportation to create a seating chart for each bus. This is necessary in the event of a surge or an outbreak that could require contact tracing.
 - c. The district will adhere to State guidelines at all times.

4. Instruction

Classroom Instruction

Per Public Acts established in June 2021, all Region 1 schools are open for in-person learning only.

- Remote learning is allowed only on a limited case-by-case basis per the [December 31, 2021 CSDE Memo](#) from Commissioner Charlene M. Russell Tucker.

5. Athletics

Athletics

1. High School Athletics
 - a. The Region One Athletic Director will follow CIAC Guidelines
 - i. Beginning March 1, 2022, student athletes, coaches and officials participating in indoor and outdoor practices and competitions will not be required to wear a mask. Individuals may choose to wear a mask during participation.
 - ii. All students, coaches, and support staff are strongly encouraged to be vaccinated against COVID 19.
 - iii. Student athletes returning to athletics post COVID infection will follow the Region One COVID-19 Return to Play Protocol.
 - iv. Spectators will be allowed at all home games.
2. Middle School Local and Regional Athletics and Activities Programs

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- a. These activities will plan to safely operate in the spring. All athletic programs will follow CIAC guidelines and with local mitigation protocols in place.
 - i. All students, coaches, and support staff are strongly encouraged to be vaccinated against COVID 19.
 - ii. Beginning March 1, 2022, student athletes, coaches and officials participating in indoor and outdoor practices and competitions will not be required to wear a mask. Individuals may choose to wear a mask during participation.
 - iii. Student athletes returning to athletics post COVID infection will follow the Region One COVID-19 Return to Play Protocol.
 - iv. Spectators will be allowed at all home games.

6. Surge Response, Outbreak Control and Worsening COVID-19 Transmission Conditions

Surge Response and Outbreak Control

According to the February 18, 2022 CT DPH guidance, surges in community spread of COVID-19 due to the emergence of new variants, waning immunity, and/or other factors can be expected to occur periodically (e.g., seasonally), and can have an impact on the risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools. Likewise, local increases in school absenteeism, especially due to respiratory illness, or an increase in reported cases of COVID-19 among students and/or staff may indicate a COVID-19 outbreak within a school or district.

The Region 1 Superintendent and the school principals contact the Region 1 Medical Advisor and the TAHD/SHD staff if there is a suspicion of increasing transmission or information suggesting an active outbreak of COVID-19 among students or staff. These medical experts will guide each school or the Region with an assessment of the situation (is it a surge or an outbreak?) and then advise with respect to next steps.

Recommended COVID-19 school *outbreak response strategies* include:

- Implementing a local **universal masking policy** for students and staff on a temporary basis. Implementation of masking can be done at the classroom, grade, or school level depending on the extent of transmission and structure of the school.
- **Limiting mixing** of impacted grades, classrooms, or other groups (i.e., cohorting) during meals, recess, and other gathering times to limit spread while a school is experiencing an outbreak.
- **Limiting outside visitors** to the school to those who are necessary for instructional or student support purposes and building maintenance.
- **Notifying potentially exposed students and staff and recommending testing.** While individual contact tracing does not need to occur, students, staff, and families should be notified of outbreaks occurring within their classroom, grade, or school level depending on the extent of transmission and structure of the school. Schools can offer testing available through state supported programs or through distribution of purchased or state provided self-test kits.
 - Testing of a group of students and/or staff associated with an outbreak should occur as soon as possible after the suspected outbreak is detected.
 - Recommendations for subsequent rounds of testing should be discussed with local health

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officials. The frequency and scope of outbreak testing can vary depending on the nature of the outbreak and the effectiveness of control measures.

- Based on capacity and local circumstances, school administrators in coordination with local health officials may choose to implement testing for all students and staff regardless of vaccination status.

Worsening COVID-19 Transmission Conditions

In addition to the outbreak response strategies listed for *Surge Response and Outbreak Control*, Region 1 schools may decide to enhance the mitigation strategies they already have in place, or redeploy strategies that have been used previously, either due to local preference or in **response to worsening conditions related to COVID-19 disease transmission** [in their communities](#) and/or [in surrounding areas](#). These changes may include enhancing:

- **Spacing** to ensure at least 3 feet between seated individuals in classrooms or during other low intensity activities and to maintain 6 feet or more between individuals during high-intensity activities (e.g., physical education, performance arts).
- **Ventilation** to ensure maximum delivery of fresh outdoor air to occupied spaces, appropriate filtration of any recirculated air, and use of outdoor spaces to the extent possible for instructional or other purposes.
- **Cleaning** protocols to ensure that all occupied spaces are cleaned thoroughly at least once per day and that higher-risk spaces and surfaces (e.g., rest rooms, frequent touch points) are routinely cleaned and disinfected.
- **Communication** to encourage a heightened awareness by students, staff, parents, and other members of the school community regarding the enhanced mitigation strategies being utilized, any new policies or procedures implemented on a temporary basis, and reinforcement of the need to remain out of school if they are experiencing any symptoms associated with COVID-19 and/or they have been made aware of a close contact with a known COVID-19 case.

The Superintendent will work with Principals, the Region 1 Medical Advisor and the TAHD/SHD staff to determine the need for enhanced mitigation practices in the case of broader community health concerns.