



PINE GROVE AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

Promoting Growth, Achievement, Success, and Direction for ALL Children!



*Heath W. Renninger
Superintendent*

September 19, 2021

Dear Pine Grove Area Families,

On June 17, 2021, our school board approved our [health and safety plan](#) which was required to conduct in-person learning. In the plan, we stated we would “follow any face covering mandate put into effect by the Pennsylvania Department of Health or Pennsylvania Department of Education.” As there was no face covering mandate at that time, face coverings remained optional at the start of school.

On August 31, 2021, the [Acting Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health issued an Order](#) requiring all students, staff, and visitors to wear face coverings indoors regardless of vaccination status. This order took effect on September 7, 2021, and remains in effect. The goal is to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, and limit the number of students quarantining due to being a close contact.

While no one likes to wear a mask, masking enables us to drastically reduce the number of students being quarantined, and allows them to continue in-person learning. **As per CDC guidance, if a student with COVID-19 and exposed students are ALL wearing masks, the exposed students do not need to quarantine. However, if an unmasked student gets COVID-19, his/her “close contacts” must quarantine, even if those “close contacts” were wearing masks.**

On Thursday, September 9, 2021, the Pine Grove Area School District Board of Directors held an emergency meeting, and approved a revised [Exception Request to Universal Face Covering Form](#). This form was posted on the School District website on September 11, 2021. To seek an exception, the form must be submitted to your child’s building principal.

We have attempted to work with parents and students to meet the expectations of the Order. Some parents have expressed a concern about paragraph 7, which states that the form may need to be revised in the future. Due to the evolving situation, it is possible that action by the state or federal government, or other circumstances, may result in changes to our current form. **However, signing the current form does not bind parents to any potential future / unknown changes.** If the form is revised, parents will have the opportunity to review the form, and decide whether or not to sign it.

As you may be aware, [COVID-19 numbers](#) continue to rise in our schools. We continue to implement a variety of mitigation efforts in an attempt to keep our schools open for in-person learning. **Unfortunately, parent / student refusal to either follow the Pa-DOH Order, or to seek an exception, is not helping.**

Pine Grove Area School District will continue working to provide reasonable educational accommodations to those that have completed the exception form. **However, beginning Monday, September 20, 2021 any student without a completed board approved exception request form on file must wear an appropriate facial covering while inside our buildings. Students who refuse to comply will be sent home, and the absence will be considered unlawful.**



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Anyone who is willfully insubordinate, disrespectful, disruptive, and/or unwilling to follow the PA DOH order (or seek an exception using the school's approved form) will be subject to disciplinary action, which may include removal from in-person learning.

We understand the mandate is seen as unwelcome by some. Our district did not establish the Face Covering Order, but we are legally obligated to follow it. You are certainly welcome to voice your opinion about the Order to your elected officials in Harrisburg.

The safety of students and staff remain our top priority. We also desire to continue to provide in-school education five days a week, accompanied by quality extra-curricular activities, but we need your support to accomplish these goals.

I would like to thank Pine Grove Area School District students, staff, faculty, administration, and community for your continued support and cooperation as we navigate through this school year

Respectfully,

Heath W. Renninger, Superintendent