

COMSTOCK PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Dr. Jeffrey J. Thoenes, Superintendent
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August 4, 2021

Board of Education,

On August 3, 2021, I received the most recent update from the Kalamazoo County Health and Community Services Department regarding COVID-19 health recommendations. Given the information and guidance provided in this document, I am prepared to make my recommendation to you about masks and COVID-19 protocols for the start of the 2021-22 school year.

As you may be aware and previous to this announcement, Gull Lake, Vicksburg, Schoolcraft, and Portage have already announced a "mask optional" approach to the coming school year while KPS had announced a policy that "everyone, regardless of vaccination status, must wear a mask for the first trimester." It's clear that there will not be uniform county-wide agreement or a statewide directive before the start of school. Therefore, we'll have to decide our own path.

Here is the key wording from the new KCHCSD memo:

"To maximize protection from the Delta variant and prevent the spread of COVID-19 to others, the CDC recommends everyone – including fully vaccinated individuals – wear a mask indoors in public if in an area of substantial or high transmission. In addition, given new evidence, the CDC is also recommending indoor face masks for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status, indicating that children should return to full-time in-person learning in the fall with layered prevention strategies. Indoor masking for all in K-12 schools aims to reduce transmission of COVID-19, prevent student and employee absenteeism due to illness, and promote a healthy, in-person learning environment."

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) and Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services Department fully support and endorse the new CDC recommendations."

As the virus has mutated, protocols that were previously considered effective are now no longer creating a safe environment. We have a duty and a responsibility to respond to the changing science of this pandemic, and it is clear we are entering a new phase with this contagion. According to the CDC, the Delta Variant is as contagious as the measles and is 50 times more contagious than the

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original strains of coronavirus that has killed over 600,000 Americans. When we went maskless for our Summer Fun Camp, at the time test positivity was hovering around 1% and we had fewer than 10 new cases of the illness in the county. Test positivity this week in Kalamazoo County is back up to over 8% and new cases are over 78 daily per million and increasing.

We've talked all along about "following the science," and the scientific experts are calling for masks in schools. Accordingly, I'll be making a recommendation to you on Monday that all employees, students, and visitors (regardless if fully vaccinated or unvaccinated) wear masks while indoors at school or on school transportation. Exceptions will be when staff are alone in their own room or office with the door closed, or when a person is eating or drinking. Additionally, we will adhere to the following protocols:

- 1) Encourage anyone eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccination,
- 2) Urge frequent hand washing,
- 3) Maintain social distance to the extent possible, and
- 4) Advise anyone to stay home when sick and get tested for COVID-19.

If anyone has any questions or concerns, please contact me so we can discuss the issues.

Sincerely,



Dr. Jeffrey J. Thoenes
Superintendent