



Office of the Superintendent
Billings Public Schools
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August 21, 2021

Re: Required Masking

Dear SD2 Stakeholder:

Effective Sunday, August 22, 2021, I am reimplementing required masking for all students, employees, and visitors during the normal school day at our K-12 schools. As I have shared in the past, I communicate regularly, often daily, with our local medical community, to ensure I understand the real-time impact of COVID-19 in our community. I have now been notified of a COVID-19 outbreak among students participating in an extracurricular activity at Skyview High School. Parents of all potentially exposed students were notified as soon as we became aware of the situation. The level of outbreak among this team is significant enough to cancel a scheduled game and cause me to reevaluate masking.

Based on the reported COVID-19 infections in Yellowstone County, including the steadily rising number among school-aged children, the outbreak with our students, the fact our hospitals are at capacity, and that the Delta variant is highly infectious, I have concluded it is in our best interest to reimplement masking in our schools. This is necessary to slow the spread of COVID-19 and to keep our schools open. I recognize the timing of this decision is unfortunate. Just a couple of days ago I announced my decision that masking would be optional in SD2. At the time, I was hopeful we could start this year without required masking. However, in the last 48 hours I learned that what started as one positive student case of COVID-19, increased to at least ten percent of that team, in just a few days. These were students who, for the most part, were together at practice outside, not inside in close proximity like we see in a normal indoor school setting. If this same rate of transmission occurred in our classrooms during the first week of school, we could potentially have hundreds, if not thousands, of our students out of class within a short time frame if we do not mask. School districts in other states have already seen that occur.

I will continue to regularly communicate with our local health officials, and utilize the most recent Yellowstone County COVID-19 metrics, as I constantly reassess the necessity of masking. At this time, I believe this is a critical step to take, to allow us the chance to keep our students safe and our schools open for in-person education and extracurricular activities. My priority remains what it has always been: to protect and educate our students to the best of our ability. My decision today is with that goal in mind. I ask that everyone pull together for the sake of our students, to allow them to have a healthy and successful school year. I appreciate everyone's patience and grace as we continue to navigate this unpleasant reality.

Respectfully,

Mr. Greg Upham
Superintendent