



WSD Mask Policies

Woodbridge Board of Education

February 23, 2022

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Key Updates

1. The Statewide mask mandate for public schools will end as of Feb. 28, 2022, leaving the decision up to local discretion.
2. The Town mask mandate as applied to Beecher Road School will end as of March 1, 2022.
3. WSD has two identical policies related to masks: 4118.237/4218.237 & 5141.8.
4. The BOE may suspend the mask policies based on a particular date, or may do nothing (in which case the current mask policies continue).
5. CSDE/DPH have advised Superintendents:
 - a. The decision about whether masks should be optional is more than a public health decision. Essentially, it is a decision about local risk tolerance: weighing the risks of unmasking against the benefits.
 - b. Since universal masking has been one of several in a suite of mitigation strategies employed against COVID-19, mask choice should be viewed in the context of that same suite.
 - c. Specific metrics have not been developed and will not be developed.

A Brief Pause: Civility in Community

- On a complex issue such as masking of students to prevent the spread of COVID-19, reasonable people may disagree.
- Our community is stronger when varied opinions are heard, listened to, and respected in dialogue, and when individuals are treated with kindness.

The Risks of Mask Choice Against the Benefits

- Major Risk of Mask Choice:
 - There may be greater spread of COVID-19 within Beecher Road School. Higher risks come to those members of the community who are unvaccinated and to those who are medically fragile.
- Major Benefits of Mask Choice:
 - Universal masking poses challenges for the full emotional development of our students.
 - Universal masking poses challenges for the full cognitive development of at least some of our students, particularly at the primary grades, where literacy development requires lips, tongue, and teeth to be seen.
 - Continued universal masking challenges a “return to normal” that many believe is necessary at some point in the COVID-19 world.

Masking as One Element of the Suite of Mitigation Strategies

- Mitigation Strategies Implemented in 2020-21 and Anticipated to Continue Permanently:
 - Enhanced air filtration & ventilation systems
 - Enhanced cleaning & disinfection
 - Enhanced use of handwashing / hand sanitizer
 - Increased attention to staying home if symptomatic/sick
 - Isolation at home if COVID-positive
- Mitigation Strategies Implemented in 2020-21 and Anticipated to Continue through Spring 2022:
 - Quarantine at home if out-of-school close contact to COVID-positive individual
 - Parent option for in-school weekly COVID testing

Masking as One Element of the Suite of Mitigation Strategies

- Mitigation Strategies Implemented in 2020-21 and Anticipated for Phase I Gradual Release, Spring 2022:
 - Quarantine at home if in-school close contact to COVID-positive individual
 - Cohorting at recess
 - Limited use of cafeteria
- Mitigation Strategies Implemented in 2020-21 and Anticipated for Phase II Gradual Release, Spring 2022:
 - Social distancing in classrooms
 - Restriction on assemblies & field trips
 - Restriction on band/chorus
 - Restriction on visitors
 - Use of desk shields (classrooms, offices, cafeteria)
- Mitigation Strategies Implemented in 2020-21 and Anticipated for Phase III Gradual Release, Spring 2022:
 - Cohorting at dismissal

Key Questions Suggested by CT DPH

- In preparing to exercise local discretion, the CT DPH has asked each local school district to consider seven key questions.

Question 1: Local Data re: COVID Transmission

- **What does the available data indicate regarding the community and district prevalence and transmission of COVID-19?**
- Three sets of data indicate a six-week decline in the community and district prevalence and transmission of COVID-19.

Question 1: Local Data re: COVID Transmission

- The most recent State-reported data (2/17/22) indicates a two-week (1/30/22 - 2/12/22) average daily rate of COVID-19 cases of 38.4 per 100,000 in the Town of Woodbridge, which is on the higher side when compared with all communities surrounding Woodbridge:

Town	Average Daily Rate of COVID-19 Cases per 100,000
Ansonia	44.8
Woodbridge	38.4
Seymour	38.2
Derby	36.5
Orange	31.3
Bethany	29.6
Hamden	27.4
New Haven	23.9

Question 1: Local Data re: COVID Transmission

- The average daily rate in Woodbridge has been dropping steadily over time since the peak of the 1/13/22 data release (representing 12/26/21 - 1/8/22):

Data Release Date	Average Daily Rate of COVID-19 Cases per 100,000
12/23/21	35.9
12/30/21	77.6
1/6/22	129.0
1/13/22	161.6
1/20/22	151.8
1/27/22	120.0
2/3/22	83.3
2/10/22	60.4
2/17/22	38.4

Question 1: Local Data re: COVID Transmission

- At Beecher Road School, the number of community members who have tested positive for COVID-19 and were at BRS when potentially symptomatic has also declined over the past six weeks:

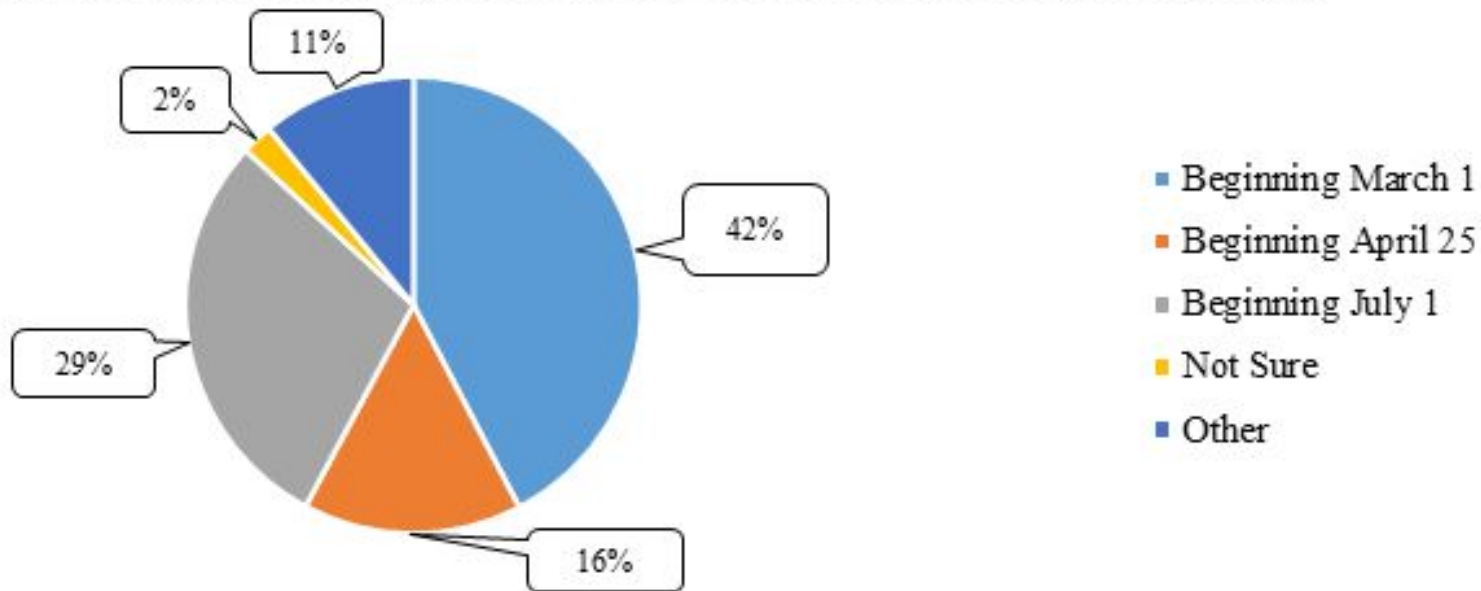
Dates	# of BRS community members confirmed as COVID-19 positive
12/19/21 - 12/25/21	10
12/26/21 - 1/1/22	5
1/2/22 - 1/8/22	8
1/9/22 - 1/15/22	28
1/16/22 - 1/22/22	12
1/23/22 - 1/29/22	16
1/30/22 - 2/5/22	4
2/6/22 - 2/12/22	5
2/13/22 - 2/19/22	1

Question 2: Local Risk Tolerance

- **What is the risk tolerance for the possibility of increasing case numbers and necessary quarantine and isolation in your students and staff?**
- A community survey the week of Feb. 14 generated responses from 586 parents/guardians and 99 staff members. All responses have been reviewed by the Superintendent and the Board of Education.
- Responses from parents/guardians and staff were similar. A plurality of both groups preferred masks to be optional as of March 1; however, a majority of both groups selected other options.

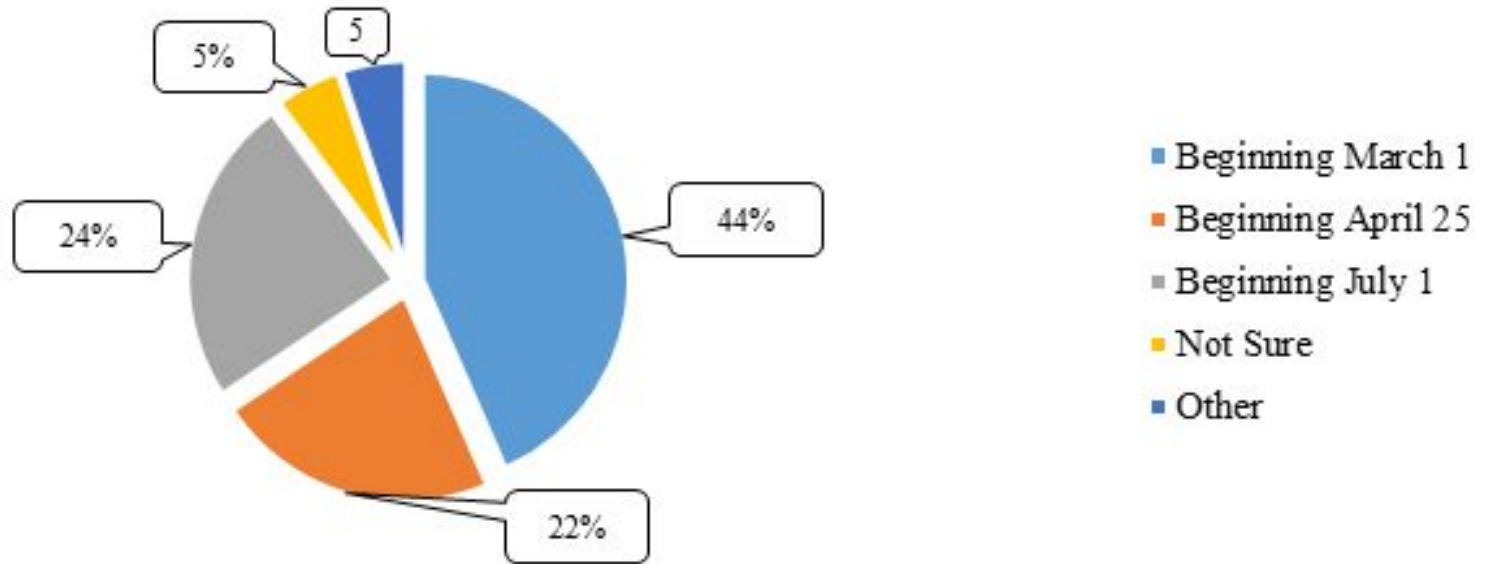
Question 2: Local Risk Tolerance

When Should Masks Become Optional at BRS? - Parent/Guardian Responses (n=586)



Question 2: Local Risk Tolerance

When Should Masks Become Optional at BRS? - Staff Responses (n=99)



Question 3: Local Data re: Vaccination Status

- **What is the current COVID-19 vaccination status of students and staff within individual schools and across the district, and what is the current COVID-19 vaccine coverage for the surrounding community?**
- 99% of **our staff** are fully vaccinated against COVID-19.
- Of **our K-6 students**, 68% are fully vaccinated, and an additional 2% are partially vaccinated. (By comparison, the Statewide vaccination rates for children ages 5-11 are 37.6% fully vaccinated, and an additional 7.9% partially vaccinated.)
- Of **our 22 PreK students**, 9% are fully vaccinated. Most of the others are not yet eligible, as they have not yet turned age 5.

Question 3: Local Data re: Vaccination Status

- In the Town of Woodbridge, 85.65% of residents are fully vaccinated, and an additional 7.42% are partially vaccinated, which is on the higher side when compared with all communities surrounding Woodbridge.

Town/County	% Fully Vaccinated	% Partially Vaccinated
Derby	91.99%	8.01%
Woodbridge	85.65%	7.42%
Orange	82.50%	6.24%
Bethany	75.63%	5.37%
<i>New Haven County</i>	<i>71.25%</i>	<i>7.07%</i>
Hamden	70.22%	6.30%
Seymour	69.73%	5.25%
New Haven	64.59%	9.67%
Ansonia	64.31%	5.60%

Question 4: Community Members at Higher Risk

- **What additional planning is necessary to address the needs of students and staff who may be at greater risk for adverse health outcomes?**
- Approximately 15 students at Beecher would be at greater risk for adverse health outcomes were they to contract COVID-19; continued masking would be advised for these students, and other mitigations on a case-specific basis.
- **Ongoing case-specific conversations** are being held with the District's Medical Advisor and Nursing Supervisor.

Question 5: Assistance with Personal Decision

- **What assistance can be provided to students and staff making personal decisions regarding mask wearing?**
 - QVHD has developed [advisory materials](#) for families and staff to use in making that personal decision.
 - Administrators would work with teachers to develop [age-appropriate messaging](#) regarding the optionality of masks, including the need for tolerance of all individuals' choices.
 - Administrators would [communicate with families](#) regarding how best to discuss with their children their decisions regarding mask use.

Question 6: Processes for Continuous Assessment

- **What processes need to be in place for continuous risk assessment and prompt decision-making regarding COVID-19 policies and mitigation strategies (including mask use) going forward?**
- **Continued regular meetings** among BOWA Superintendents, school administrators, local health districts' directors, medical advisors, and nursing supervisors will review risk and advise regarding continued decision-making.
- Those meetings will be informed by, and will inform, meetings of **each district's Safe Return Committee**.

Question 7: Advanced Contingency Planning

- **What advanced contingency planning needs to occur to prepare for potential surges and/or outbreaks?**
- If necessary, WSD is poised to address potential surges and/or outbreaks based on **the suite of supportive mitigation strategies** employed in prior months, including strong communication to families.

In Summary

- Valid reasons exist for suspending the WSD mask mandate.
- Valid reasons exist for continuing the WSD mask mandate.

- Currently, the CDC and the AAP continue to support universal masking in public schools.
- The CT Department of Public Health has encouraged each community “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).”

In Summary

- Universal masking can be seen as one of several mitigation strategies that can be relaxed this spring.
- If COVID-19 positivity rates begin to rise again, universal masking and/or other mitigation strategies can be re-implemented.
- Note: Masks on school buses will be required until at least March 18, a date set federally. Masks will also be required in certain circumstances such as on days 6-10 when individuals return from quarantine due to an out-of-school close contact.
- Prior to the first day of mask choice, each student & staff member will be provided two test kits. One test should be performed at home prior to leaving for school on the first day mask choice is implemented.

Potential Motions

- Move that we suspend Policies 4118.237/4218.237 and 5141.8 effective March 7, 2022.*
- Move that we suspend Policies 4118.237/4218.237 and 5141.8 effective April 25, 2022.
- Move that we suspend Policies 4118.237/4218.237 and 5141.8 effective July 1, 2022.

** To ensure strong implementation, earlier than March 7 is not recommended by the administrative team.*