

August 19, 2020

To All Students and Families:

With the approach of the first days of school in the coming weeks there are many changes to comprehend. I realize you are likely overwhelmed at the moment. I truly wish there was more we could do to bring some normalcy to this school year. However, the safety of students, staff, and the whole community need to remain at the forefront of our decisions.

We are eager to have students and staff return to school, but realize for at least the start of this school year, that will look and feel very different than we would like. The district is fortunate to have dedicated staff who are working diligently to ensure that we are prepared to welcome students back. There certainly will be challenges, but we will work through them. I ask for your continued patience and cooperation with all of the school staff as we adjust to these changes, and please know we certainly will work with you also. We are all in this together.

As I am sure you are aware, on Monday the Department of Health issued new guidance to schools regarding face coverings and students. This change was unexpected, but our hybrid model still positions us for the greatest safety for everyone and allows students the most opportunities to remove their masks during the school day.

New PA-DOH Orders Issued Monday, August 17

The new PA-DOH language now requires all individuals over the age of two without medically documented reasons to wear a face covering during the school day except when:

- Eating or drinking when seated six feet apart.
- Operating equipment that would present a safety hazard.
- During face-covering breaks when six feet apart and lasting no more than 10 minutes in length.

To read the notice from PA-DOH and their revised FAQ:

<https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/SchoolReopeningGuidance/ReopeningPreKto12/PublicHealthGuidance/Pages/default.aspx>

Because we are operating on a hybrid schedule, the steps we took inside the schools to physically distance students will allow for face covering breaks throughout the school day and in the cafeterias while eating. Our 50% student capacity model does provide six feet of distance in these locations and mask breaks will be provided.

The district is providing face masks for all students and staff and face shields are available if needed. Families are still encouraged to maintain a supply of masks for their students.

Face Coverings in School:

Adjusting to the new requirements, students will need to wear a face covering when:

- On the school bus.
- Entering and exiting the school building.
- In the hallways, restrooms, and other indoor congregate areas.
- In classrooms except during masks breaks as provided by teachers.

Students will be able to remove masks:

- During outdoor activities when six feet of physical distance is maintained.
- In the cafeteria while eating / drinking and seated six feet from others.
- When operating equipment that wearing a face covering presents a hazard.

Medical Documentation Requirements to Not Wear a Face Covering

Medical documentation is required for students unable to wear a face mask. The doctor's orders must also address the ability of the student to wear a face shield as an alternative. If both a face mask AND a face shield are not possible due to medical reasons, then the administration will meet with the student and family to discuss appropriate options.

Medical orders and the parent / administration meeting must occur prior to the student's arrival without a face covering.

These orders can be provided directly to the student's building principal or to the Pandemic Coordinator, Mrs. Cheryl Schonewolf, at Rommelt Elementary School. All faxed orders should be sent to: 570-326-0641 Attention Mrs. Cheryl Schonewolf.

As ordered by the PA-DOH, a parent note alone is insufficient to excuse a student from wearing a face covering.

Return to School

Over the last two weeks, the PA-DOH has also provided COVID-19 infection transmission metrics on a county-by-county level that we will use to determine when to return to school full time. These metrics will assist us in making an informed and local decision. Like you we are eager to have students in school every day. Collectively, we control those metrics by the actions we take. I encourage everyone to follow basic hygiene practices, maintain social distancing, and wearing a face covering.

Principals are mailing letters to families this week that detail the first days of school. After reviewing this information, please contact your student's principal or school counselor as needed. For COVID-19 related questions, please email Mrs. Cheryl Schonewolf at covid19@swasd.org.

Sincerely,

Mark Stamm

Mark Stamm, D.Ed
Superintendent of Schools