

Dear Parents,

I hope this finds you well. We are only a few days away from ACES schools and programs transitioning to mask-optional status. Since the last update, there has been additional information released from the CDC on mask wearing and transportation that we would like to clarify. *The previous update has been revised to reflect this new guidance.*

As we reported last week, ***all ACES schools and programs will be 'mask optional' effective March 7, 2022.*** The following points were shared last week and include new details regarding transportation:

- **Mask Optional in schools:** Students and staff may select whether or not to wear a mask while indoors; *the CDC has further indicated that masks are optional on transportation in areas with low to medium transmission and because, New Haven county presently meets this description, masks will remain optional in buses and vans as well;*
- **Self-testing before going mask optional:** All students and staff should self-test on/around March 7th prior to the start of the mask optional period as this will allow us to establish a baseline set of indicators; *schools have been provided tests kits for students to take home and staff members have been surveyed as to who needs a test kit to self-screen prior to March 7; Only positive test results should be reported to the school and/or program;*
- **Supporting those who wish to continue wearing masks:** The choice whether to wear a mask or not is highly personal and should be respected; All students and staff may wish to continue wearing masks; this is a highly anticipated response, especially after two years and school programs will support those that decide to do so;
- **Providing masks as necessary to students and staff:** The CDC continues to recommend wearing masks ACES will continue to provide students and staff with masks as necessary;
- **Providing test kits to students and staff as necessary:** while supplies allow, test kits will be available to students who are unable to obtain free tests from the Federal government or through their insurance;
- **Daily self-screening:** All students, staff, and families should self-screen daily for any COVID-19 symptoms;
- **Continuing current isolation guidelines:** Isolation practices from the CDC will continue to be followed;
- **Mask wearing in isolation areas and the nursing offices:** Symptomatic students **must** wear masks while in the isolation areas or the nursing office; School Nurses reserve the right to direct students and/or staff to wear masks based on symptoms;
- **Mask wearing when picking up sick children:** We ask that parents wear masks coming into school in the event a symptomatic child must be picked up from the nurse's office;
- **Staying home when sick:** Symptomatic students or staff should remain home and not come to school/work; students and staff who are symptomatic while in an ACES school and/or program will be sent home; children who are sick should not be sent to school under any circumstances; Similarly, parents who are symptomatic should remain out of ACES schools and/or programs;
- **Continued monitoring and ability to adjust practices:** ACES will monitor local and school health data related to the virus; ACES reserves the right to reimplement required mask wearing if necessary in individual schools and/or programs or throughout the entire agency;

- **Adjusting school efforts to reflect best practices:** Privacy screens (also known as desk shields) are not proven to be effective in preventing the transmission of the COVID-19 virus and are no longer necessary.

According to the CDC, vaccination remains the best mitigation strategy to prevent significant illness and to avoid hospitalization. ACES has conducted several vaccination clinics and will keep offering them while this remains an option.

We thank you for your continued support as we transition into this new phase of the virus. We recognize that the pandemic has caused us to be tired but, the pandemic is not yet over. We are merely entering a new time period associated with it. Our success depends upon everyone working together. Our COVID team will provide you with updates as we learn them.

Thank you.