

August 25, 2021

West Deptford Community:



On Monday, June 28, 2021, Governor Murphy released “The Road Forward” with guidance on the reopening of schools for the 2021-2022 school year. This guidance left decisions and the development of policies/practices regarding face covering mandates in the academic environment up to local Districts and Boards of Education. As was communicated at that time, it was a part of West Deptford School District’s “Safe Return Plan” that face coverings would be optional as of July 1, 2021. As expected, and as was the case in every local school district, this individual decision led to debate amongst community members and parents who felt either strong opposition or strong support for the mandating of masks for the academic school day.

As you may be aware, on Friday, August 6, 2021, Governor Murphy released an updated public statement and the details of his latest Executive Order ([EO 251](#)) regarding new expectations and guidelines for the start of the 2021-2022 school year. EO 251 **REQUIRES** all PUBLIC, PRIVATE, PAROCHIAL, PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS, and ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS to enforce a **MANDATE** on face coverings for staff, students, and visitors in the indoor portion of school district premises unless certain exceptions apply. In response to this latest Executive Order, face coverings will be **REQUIRED** for all students, staff, and visitors in the West Deptford School District for the start of the 2021-2022 academic year, and until further notice.

To minimize risk to the school community, students and staff will be encouraged to stay home when they are displaying COVID-19 symptoms. Families will be encouraged to report symptoms to the school nurse for monitoring. Please click [here](#) to view information from the NJ Department of Health with information regarding vaccines and COVID testing information. As part of Executive Order 251, parents have the right to seek a medical exemption to the mask mandate. In order to request medical exemption, parents must complete the attached [Mask Exemption Request Form](#) **and** provide medical documentation from the student’s local health care provider indicating that a mask exemption is medically warranted. All required information (*Mask Exemption Form/Release of Medical Information* and all pertinent medical documentation from healthcare provider) must be provided to the Office of the Superintendent **no later than Wednesday, September 1, 2021** for exemption to go into effect for the first day of school. This form is required for all students seeking a mask exemption for 21-22, regardless if an exemption was available last year based on programming placement. **No student** is considered exempt from the mask mandate as described in EO 251 until the parent has been notified of verification and/or approval.

We continue to receive questions from community members and parents in response to this latest directive from the NJ Governor’s Office. From those communications and inquiries, the attached [FAQs](#) have been developed to help answer some of the questions that have been presented. As we are all aware, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to present unique challenges for public schools responsible for the health and safety of students and staff as well as providing an effective free and appropriate public education to all. While this list of FAQs is not comprehensive and additional questions are raised daily, it is our intention to communicate with our parents and families as effectively as possible as we all prepare for the third school year that COVID-19 has, at least in part, affected our children. With the details and directive of the latest Executive Order, many questions and frustrations that we are attempting to address would be better directed at State officials, as local school districts, including West Deptford, are required to comply and plan for the most successful year possible with the information that we currently have been provided. As always, we thank you for your continued support of our District during these difficult times and please know that we are continuing to work tirelessly to plan for a successful and memorable 2021-2022 school year.

Sincerely,

Greg Cappello
Superintendent