

**Subject:** Mask Mandate – Reedsport School District

Attached (below) is a link to the most up to date mask requirement affecting Oregon Schools. It became effective August 2 and we have to be in compliance now. Please note that part of the rule lists the consequence for not following the rule. This will apply to summer programs that might still be occurring.

<https://secure.sos.state.or.us/oard/viewSingleRule.action?ruleVrsnRsn=280183>

In addition, the Governor has applied a state-wide indoor mask mandate to all public places beginning today. Her mandate supersedes the OHA rule. If her mandate were to go away, then we would still need to revert to the OHA rule. The OHA rule is important for us to know and understand once the Governor's mandate is lifted.

While the rule only applies to INDOOR settings, the reason for the recent rule change provides us with a reason to continue wearing masks in most every setting. Listening to Dr. Dean Sidlinger from OHA, science has learned much more about the Covid virus and it's variants in recent weeks. The increased knowledge of how the virus is spreading has caused the level of concern in the OHA we can attribute to the writing of the rule. Vaccines and mask usage remain the 2 priorities it seems for the CDC and our OHA in terms of getting students back to school for full days; full time.

Keeping schools open is a clear priority. No one in any of my professional meetings has any doubt about how important this is. They also seem to feel that the best way to ensure that schools can be safely opened is when mask use occurs along with other locally determined mitigation efforts, including but not limited to distance and handwashing. Vaccination is important for those who are able but nearly half of the bodies in our district are not able; mostly due to their young age (under 12). Local decision making is allowed for a wide variety of mitigation efforts and safe operation protocols. Of the previous 126 rules for school operation, 122 of the rules (including mitigation) are now local control matters.

Concerns of Note:

\*I need to acknowledge that the sudden nature of change in the mask expectations has created distrust among some in our community and state. When people left last school year and the messaging we had was that masks would be a local decision, the change to a state level rule (and mandate) has generated distrust for some people.

\*Lack of clarification creates confusion. The nature of this new relatively brief OHA rule leave many operational decisions vague as potential local control. There still appears to be the same liability for failure to follow the rules. This has caused confusion as some people wonder if there is really a vehicle for local decision making around covid and its variants.

\*One of the biggest concerns for the school is that this recent change creates a potential lack of clarity for families who might see the School District as the reason or cause of the mask change rather than the State of Oregon and the

Oregon Health Authority as the actual reason. The school is not a political entity and doesn't get much input on laws/rules/mandates at the level of this recent OHA mask rule.

\*There are numerous other motives that people feel upset about regarding this mask rule change – but in general, people feel surprised and/or backed into a corner because of the sudden change in rule since school closed last spring.

Support of Note:

Supporters of this rule seem content that the protective measure afforded by masks is going to reduce risk of illness to our school district.

They seem to acknowledge that the science has changed and that with new information, making a change of this nature is appropriate and necessary.

Supporters seem to feel that taking extra safety measures to ensure that students go to school for full days, every day is worth the effort for the value that a school day has on the life/growth of a student.

Supporters seem to acknowledge the fact that the Governor's right to impose this type of rule under her State of Emergency Authority is sufficient for the district to follow the rule/mandate/law.

Going forward I know that I signed an employment contract requiring me to follow the laws of the United States and the State of Oregon. Our School Board members take an oath to do the same. This rule is in place and we must follow it until such time as a change is permitted. We do not get to write a policy to override a rule at this level and that is very frustrating to some people. The school will continue to stand up for its students, staff, and community. It also has to operate in the frameworks that are permitted and must follow the processes for providing input and creating rules.

It is foolish to ignore the clear fact that there are people in the community and state who disagree with this and have concerns. By taking the position of following the mask rule, we do so for the safety of our students, staff, and patrons. Schools do not need to be a political battleground. They need to be safe places for children to learn, access resources, and receive care. My personal politics are not on display by following the laws/rules impacting this position. Instead, I am focused on doing what I can for schools in the best manner possible (under the law) and hopefully with the support of the community on behalf of their children. If and when the rules/mandates regarding mask use change, our district will remain nimble and respond accordingly. Until then, this is the direction we will all follow.

On August 17, the School Board will be meeting and will discuss and provide input on other pandemic safety protocols in which local control is allowed. They will provide guidance on how the buildings provide the mitigation efforts now part of our local control decisions.

In the meantime, here is a link people can use to share their opinion on this matter directly with Governor Brown's Offices. It is my understanding that our County level governments and education professional organizations are not heard regarding this issue so feedback might be best directed to the Governor's Office:

<https://www.oregon.gov/gov/Pages/share-your-opinion.aspx>

I hope that people have their own thoughts about this (and any) issue. It is not my intent to try to change minds through this email, rather to be transparent about the decision. I will continue to monitor changes in guidance/rules/mandates. I will continue to provide communication similar to the past (virtual and in person group Q/A meetings, individual meetings and calls, advocacy in my professional meetings for the needs of our district). Please stay safe.

Yours in education,

jz