

Dear Parents and Guardians,

This past week has been extremely upsetting and challenging for all of us. I appreciate all of the phone calls, emails, and support. As a community, we have been thrown into an impossible situation, but in typical Bellwood fashion, you have heard what all districts are required to do and have supported our district, even though you may not agree with Governor Wolf's mandates. I have appreciated the professionalism and understanding that you have shown.

There are many different viewpoints on the Governor's and DOH's mask orders. No matter how you feel about this order there have been similar questions asked by both sides. I would like to take a moment and review the events that have recently transpired. Also, I have included a Frequently Asked Questions section to help clarify what is happening and what to expect in the near future.

Last school year, the district worked hard to develop a safe educational setting that provided the greatest flexibility to parents while providing the best education possible. March of 2020 saw the abrupt end to traditional education as we were forced to close school and teach lessons remotely, spring sports ended, prom was cancelled, and there was a significantly different graduation ceremony. The 2020-2021 school year offered Face-to-Face instruction with a virtual option, the return of extra-curricular activities with significant restrictions, social distancing while in school, and masking.

The District School Board, Administration, Faculty, and Staff have worked hard this summer to make safe decisions for our students return to school. This plan focused on safety and parent choice regarding mask wearing. This was not an easy task as I mentioned in the September 1, 2021 information letter. At that time, the Governor stated several times that districts had "local control" to make the best decisions about education as we knew what was best for our children. On Tuesday, that was all changed. We are now faced with another challenge to educate our children with masks. This was not the decision of the School Board or the Administration. However, we are required to enforce this mandate.

Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: Is the district required to follow the Department of Health Mask Order?**

**A:** Yes, our solicitor and insurance carrier have advised us that we must follow the Department of Health's order at this time. There are significant penalties for the district as well as district employees and School Board Members personally for non-compliance.

**Q: What are the penalties for non-compliance of the Dept. of Health Order?**

**A:** According to information provided by the state Department of Education, failing to enforce the school mask mandate could lead to lawsuits, fines and, potentially jail time under the Disease Prevention and Control Act of 1955, with personal liability under 42 Pa.C.S. 8850 (willful misconduct). That statute states that an employee of a local agency like a school district would lose sovereign immunity if there is an injury caused by an act of the employee that constitutes "a crime, actual fraud, actual malice or willful misconduct."

**Q: Is there an exemption form that parents/guardians can submit?**

**A:** Yes. At this time, the only exemption that is permissible is a medical exemption. This note must be signed by a doctor or mental health provider.

**Q: How long do I have to get a doctor or mental health provider to sign the exemption form?**

**A:** If you believe that your child qualifies for a medical exemption, please complete the form and email it to your child's principal immediately. Upon submission, you will have five school days to submit a signed doctor's note verifying the need for exemption.

**Q: Last school year, the district offered a virtual option. Will that option be available this year?**

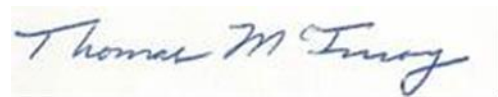
**A:** We started this school year without the virtual option as we believe that face-to-face, in person learning is the best educational delivery system and there was a choice for wearing a mask. However, if we see our positive COVID cases increase, we will consider reinstating the virtual option.

**Q: What happens if I will not let my child wear a mask?**

**A:** If a student does not have a mask, they will be sent to the principal's office and provided one. If they refuse to wear a mask, they will be sent to a location within the school where they can socially distance. If a student continually refuses to wear a mask, the same disciplinary process that was in place last school year will be utilized and which is outlined in the student handbook. This includes, but not limited to being sent home and detention. Remember, the district is not happy about this order either, the state government has placed us in this situation. The School Board is working on a resolution in an effort to reverse the mandate.

As we have done in the past, we will work through the challenges that have been thrust upon us together. We promise to be as accommodating as possible with mask breaks. We also promise to do our best to make this school year the best that it can possibly be.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Thomas M. Inroy". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Thomas McInroy

Superintendent

Bellwood-Antis School District