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Dear Hamilton City School District Parents, Guardians, and Students,

Thank you for your understanding during the past several weeks regarding the district imposed mask mandate. The mandate has allowed over 800 students that would have been quarantined to attend school safely and regularly.

HCSD Board of Education and the district is committed to providing students a 5-day in-person educational experience. We want our students to stay in school - in person. The district and HCSD BOE have closely followed the guidance from the Ohio Department of Health throughout the pandemic.

Monday morning (10/25/2021), the Ohio Department of Health amended its quarantine guidelines. Given this change, the district will change the quarantine guidelines and masking requirements recommended and approved at the September 3, 2021, HCSD Board of Education meeting.

Quarantining students at home exposed to COVID-19 in a school environment has the unintended consequence of reducing in-school learning and can strain parents, schools, and local health departments.

While vaccination and mask usage are critical components to ensure a safe school environment, the HCSD will offer an in-school alternative to quarantining students and staff at home exposed to COVID-19 in the school environment to support in-school learning and reduce strain.

The in-school alternative is informed by a growing body of national experience, a pilot in Warren County, and knowledge shared by other local health departments that points toward a low number of individuals with direct contact to a COVID-19 positive individual within the school setting who convert to positive cases.

Based on this information and the success of the Warren County pilot, the HCSD will be following the recommended guidance from the Ohio Department of Health ("*Mask to Stay/Test to Play*") for students in the PK - 12 setting regarding students and staff.

Please Note:

Eligibility to participate in the “Mask to Stay/Test to Play” alternative is contingent on the exposure being in the school setting or school-related activities. This does not apply to household exposures or exposures outside the school setting or school-related activities.

Starting on **Wednesday, October 27th, 2021**, all HCSD students and employees will be **“Strongly Recommended”** to wear face coverings indoors, regardless of vaccination status. This is a change from the current **“Mandatory”** masking requirement. The federal criteria of **“Mandatory”** face coverings on school buses will still be in effect.

The new quarantine guidelines from the Ohio Department of Health (*“Mask to Stay - Test to Play”*) and endorsed by Hamilton City Schools include the following:

“Mask to Stay”

In-School Setting Quarantine Guidelines (Classroom and During the School Day)

1. Direct contacts, regardless of vaccination or masking status, may remain in the classroom environment if they do the following:
 - a. Wear a mask for 14 days after their last date of exposure.*
 - b. Self-monitor, or parent monitor, for [symptoms of COVID-19](#).
 - c. Isolate and get tested if they start to experience symptoms associated with COVID-19 (regardless of the level of severity).

* Students/staff that have been identified as “close contact” and are attending school with a mask can be exempt from wearing a mask after day seven (7) if all the following occur:

- a. The student/staff exhibits no COVID-19 symptoms.
- b. The student/staff don’t develop symptoms **AND** test negative between days 5 - 7.

Direct contacts of COVID-19 are those identified as being directly exposed to COVID 19 by the positive case.

REMINDER:

COVID-19 is a respiratory virus and does not require physical contact to spread. It is spread through sneezing, coughing, talking, and breathing. These factors should be considered when determining the level of exposure and direct contact. Best practices for distancing are three ft. (3) with individuals masked and six (6) ft. if the individual is not masked.

Parents and students are responsible for symptom monitoring; however, if nurses/school staff see a child exhibiting symptoms, they will act accordingly.

“Test to Play”

Co-Extracurricular Activities (Beyond the Academic School Day)

1. Asymptomatic contacts may continue to participate in co-extracurricular activities if they do the following:
 - a. Mask whenever possible (locker rooms, sitting/standing on the sidelines, waiting to participate during performing or visual arts activities, public transportation; and anytime the mask will not interfere with breathing, the activity, or create a safety hazard)
 - b. Test on initial exposure to COVID -19.
 - c. Test again on days 5 - 7. If the test is negative, the student will test out of quarantine.

Please Note:

The tests referenced above are SARS-CoV-2 viral (PCR or antigen) tests. The test must be monitored/proctored/observed and cannot be an over-the-counter, at-home test that was self-administered without a proctor.

The changes in the quarantine guidelines incorporate mask-wearing and testing to reduce the chance of the spread of COVID-19 within a structured school setting and provide a safe alternative to quarantine. The quarantine and masking protocols are always subject to be amended as data regarding positive cases, and quarantine rates change within the Hamilton City School District and Hamilton community.

Additionally, vaccination is always encouraged, and the district will be communicating two vaccination locations for students aged 5 - 11 to receive the COVID-19 vaccination in the upcoming weeks.

Thank you for your support of Hamilton City Schools, and do not hesitate to contact your building administrator with additional questions.

Respectfully,

Michael Holbrook
HCSD Superintendent