

The board is committed to providing an in-person learning and work environment that is as safe as reasonably possible during the COVID-19 pandemic. The board recognizes that the use of face coverings helps to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and limit the need for quarantining. The board also recognizes that the Centers for Disease Control, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Occupational Health and Safety Administration, and the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services recommend the use of face coverings in schools. Therefore, as part of its layered mitigation strategy to lower the risk of COVID-19 exposure and spread, the board requires face coverings to be worn by all students, employees, and visitors present on school campus during the 2021-2022 school year in accordance with this policy.

**A. FACE COVERINGS REQUIRED**

All individuals, including students, employees, and visitors, regardless of vaccination status, must wear face coverings at all times while inside of school buildings or on school transportation vehicles, including school buses, vans, and other group school transportation. Generally, individuals are not required to wear face coverings while outdoors or while in personal vehicles on school grounds. However, masks must be worn in crowded outdoor settings or during activities that involve sustained close contact with other people.

**B. FACE COVERING EXEMPTIONS****1. Individuals Exempted**

The following individuals are exempted from face covering requirements:

- a. children under two years of age;
- b. individuals who should not wear a face covering due to a medical or behavioral condition or disability (including, but not limited to, any person who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious or incapacitated, or is otherwise unable to put on or remove the face covering without assistance); and
- c. children who are unable to wear the face covering safely.

**2. Situations Exempted**

Face coverings do not need to be worn in the following situations:

- a. when seeking to communicate with someone who is hearing-impaired in a way that requires the mouth to be visible;

- b. when giving a speech for a broadcast or to an audience if at least 20 feet away from the audience;
- c. if temporarily removing the face covering to secure medical services or for identification purposes;
- d. when wearing a face covering at work would put the individual at risk, as determined by local, state, or federal regulations or workplace safety guidelines;
- e. if the face covering would impede visibility while operating equipment or a vehicle;
- f. while sleeping, swimming, or playing in water;
- g. while actively eating or drinking (Because face coverings cannot be worn consistently during mealtimes, students should maintain physical distancing of a minimum of three feet to the fullest extent possible when actively eating. Principals are encouraged to arrange for students to eat meals outdoors if possible.); and
- h. while actually participating in an athletic event, *i.e.* on the field of play. A student who is actually participating in an athletic event, as opposed to remaining with the team on the sidelines, on the bench, or otherwise as a substitute, is not required to wear a facial covering during the time he/she is participating in the contest, *i.e.* playing in the game.

### **C. PROPER FACE COVERING**

To provide the greatest protection against the spread of COVID-19, face coverings must be worn properly. The face covering should completely cover the individual's nose and mouth and fit snugly around the face with no gaps. Face coverings that have a nose wire (a metal strip along the top of the mask that is bent over the nose to fit the face covering close to the face) are recommended in order to prevent air from leaking out the top of the face covering.

Face coverings may be either disposable masks (also called surgical masks or medical procedure masks) made of multiple layers of non-woven material or cloth masks made of at least two layers of tightly-woven, washable, breathable fabric. For better fit and extra protection, a disposable mask may be worn underneath a cloth mask. Two disposable masks should not be worn together. Face shields, masks with exhalation valves or vents, single layer masks or masks made of thin fabric that don't block light, scarves, ski masks, bandannas, and turtleneck collars do not qualify as face coverings for purposes of this policy.

### **D. FAILURE TO WEAR A FACE COVERING**

1. Students

Face coverings will be provided to students who need them, including students who forget to bring their face coverings to school and students who are unable to afford them. No disciplinary action will be taken against a student for failure to bring a face covering to school.

Refusing to wear, intentionally removing, or inappropriately wearing a face covering in violation of this policy is considered a form of disruptive behavior, prohibited by policy 4315, Disruptive Behavior. Disciplinary consequences will be handled in accordance with policy 4315.

No discipline will be imposed on any student who has been granted an exemption to the face covering requirement as provided in Section B. Disciplinary action for a student with a disability who has not been granted an exemption as provided in Section B will be in accordance with policy 4307, Disciplinary Action for Exceptional Children/Students with Disabilities.

2. Employees

Face coverings will be provided to employees who need them. Refusal by an employee to wear a face covering in accordance with this policy will be considered insubordination and may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination, unless the employee has been granted an exemption as provided in Section B.

3. Visitors

Visitors will not be admitted into a school building or onto a school vehicle without wearing a face covering unless an exemption, as described in Section B, applies.

**E. NOTICE**

The principal or designee shall notify all students, parents, and employees of this policy and provide guidance and information regarding the proper use, wearing, removal, and cleaning of cloth face coverings. In addition, the principal or designee shall post signs at entrances to school buildings to alert visitors to the face covering requirements.

**F. REVIEW OF THIS POLICY**

This policy will remain in effect for the 2021-2022 school year only. At least once a month the board will review this policy and consider the need for modifications. The board will vote to approve this policy, with any necessary modifications, at a regularly scheduled board meeting each month.

Legal References: S.L. 2021-130, sec. 10

Cross References: Disciplinary Action for Exceptional Children/Students with Disabilities (policy 4307), Disruptive Behavior (policy 4315)

Other Resources: *COVID-19 Guidance for Safe Schools*, updated July 18, 2021, American Academy of Pediatrics, available at <https://www.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/>; *ED COVID-19 Handbook, Vol. 1: Strategies for Safely Reopening Elementary and Secondary Schools*, updated April 2021, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, available at <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/coronavirus/reopening.pdf>; *Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools*, updated August 5, 2021, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>; *Protecting Workers: Guidance on Mitigating and Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 in the Workplace*, updated August 13, 2021, Occupational Health and Safety Administration, available at <https://www.osha.gov/coronavirus/safework>; *Requirement for Persons to Wear Masks While on Conveyances and at Transportation Hubs*, Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Health and Human Services (February 3, 2021), available at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-02-03/pdf/2021-02340.pdf>; *StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit (K-12), Interim Guidance*, updated August 26, 2021, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, available at <https://files.nc.gov/covid/documents/guidance/Strong-Schools-NC-Public-Health-Toolkit.pdf>; *Your Guide to Masks*, updated August 13, 2021, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html>

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