*****Massachusetts Department of***

***Elementary and Secondary Education***

### 75 Pleasant Street, Malden, Massachusetts 02148-4906 Telephone: (781) 338-3000 TTY: N.E.T. Relay 1-800-439-2370

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| Jeffrey C. Riley  *Commissioner* |  |

# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:** | Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner |
| **Date:** | March 14, 2022 |
| **Subject:** | Update on Action Steps to Support Schools, Students, and Families |

Since our meeting on February 15, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department or DESE) has continued to inform districts of new developments related to COVID-19 and to support schools and districts as they navigate teaching and learning during the pandemic.

On February 9, I announced that, after consulting with medical experts and state health officials, I would not renew the state mask requirement after it expired on February 28. The Commonwealth’s high vaccination rates and widespread availability of COVID-19 testing for school personnel and students support this decision.

Not long afterward, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced that, effective February 25, it would no longer require that masks be worn on school buses or vans for K-12 students and children in childcare programs. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Department of Public Health strongly recommend students and staff continue to follow the DESE-DPH Protocols for Responding to COVID-19 Scenarios.

As always, any individual who wishes to continue to mask, including those who face higher risk from COVID-19, should be supported in that choice. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and DPH strongly recommend that unvaccinated individuals should continue to wear masks in school settings, and the two departments strongly urge all eligible individuals to receive the COVID-19 vaccine and booster. The departments also continue to encourage schools to hold vaccination clinics.

With the changes to federal and statewide masking requirements, we have updated the [DESE/DPH Protocols for Responding to COVID-19 Scenarios — SY 2021-22](https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/on-desktop/protocols/), and to make frequently asked questions easier to find, we compiled our multiple FAQs into a single document in which updates are highlighted.

I will continue to monitor public health data, consult with medical experts and state health officials, and issue further guidance and/or requirements as needed, and as always, the DESE Rapid Respond COVID-19 Help Center remains open and available for consultation with districts and schools.

Attachments:

* [Update on Mask Requirement](https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/on-desktop/2022-0209mask-requirement-update.pdf) – February 9, 2022; updated February 28, 2022
* [Press Release: Statewide School Mask Requirement Will Be Lifted February 28](https://mailchi.mp/doe.mass.edu/press-releasestatewide-school-mask-requirement-will-be-lifted-february-28) – February 9, 2022
* [Masking on Buses, Commissioner’s Weekly Update](https://mailchi.mp/doe.mass.edu/commissioners-weekly-update-2-28-22-masking-on-buses-early-literacy-pd-aaac-to-meet?e=e54ceaa84b#maskingon) – February 28, 2022
* [DESE and DPH Frequently Asked Questions Compilation Document](https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/faq/faq-compilation.docx) *(download)* — Updated February 28, 2022

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