



THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

February 25, 2022

Dear School and Early Childhood Communities:

Thank you for all the work you've done to provide unwavering support to students and families over the past two years; thank you for working so hard to keep your students and school communities safe; and **thank you for helping get students back to school full-time and in-person, where they learn best.** I know everyone is eager to focus on helping students learn and thrive – that's why you got into this profession. And I believe, with today's news, we took important steps to further advance that objective.

Earlier today, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released an updated framework for how we understand and respond to the risks and impacts of COVID-19 in our communities. Their newest guidelines reflect the latest data and evolving science surrounding COVID-19, creating COVID-19 community levels that account for severity of disease and the capacity of our health care system to respond. We are now in a better position than ever before to fight COVID-19 – including to prevent medically-significant illness, minimize the burden on our health care system, and protect the most vulnerable in our communities through vaccines, treatments, and prevention. To find out the COVID-19 community level in your community, please visit the [CDC website](#).

Importantly, as part of this new framework, **masking guidelines for school and early care settings now follow the same guidelines for the community in which they are located.** This is a change from the previous CDC guidance, where universal masking was recommended for all K-12, early care, and education settings, like child care and family child care providers. Based on the latest data, CDC now recommends universal masking for:

- Schools located in areas where the COVID-19 community level is high;
- Early care and education centers located in areas where the COVID-19 community level is high; and
- School buses and vans for schools and early care and education centers where the COVID-19 community level is high

School districts, schools, early childhood centers and homes, and classrooms may still choose to implement masking at any COVID-19 community level depending on their community's needs – and especially keeping in mind those for whom prevention strategies provide critical protection for in-person learning. Implementing layered prevention strategies in schools can protect the rights of students with disabilities and ensure their continued access to safe in-person learning. To learn more about how you can protect students, including students who are immunocompromised and students with disabilities in your school community, please visit the

Department of Education's [COVID-19 website](#) and be on the lookout for additional resources to be added to this website in the weeks to come.

Even with this change in guidance, our goal remains the same: that schools have the resources they need to remain open five days per week for full-time, in-person learning for all students, that they are meeting the academic and mental health needs students bring with them to school, and that they are ready and prepared to provide a safe learning environment for all. The #1 tool we have available right now to make sure our schools remain safe and open for all students is vaccination. I encourage schools to continue to provide vaccination information to parents and families, and to host vaccination clinics at schools and in the community for students, families, and staff to receive their first, second, and booster doses. I also encourage you to partner with students, parents, and educators to use American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds to help students catch up academically, provide mental health supports, and improve school safety, including improving ventilation, so all students have an opportunity to thrive.

In order to provide additional support and guidance, the Department of Education, together with the CDC and the Department of Health and Human Services, will provide many opportunities to answer your questions and discuss the implications of the new guidance in your classrooms. In addition, please refer to the [Office of Head Start website](#) for requirements specific to Head Start. To continue to learn more and stay abreast of CDC updates, I also invite you to review the new [CDC guidelines](#).

Thank you for all you have done to make safe, in-person learning a reality for our kids!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Miguel A. Cardona". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Miguel A. Cardona, Ed.D.
U.S. Secretary of Education