



UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT

"Home of the Golden Knights and Damsels"

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Updated Masking Order

September 10, 2021

Dear Parents, Guardians, Students, and Community,

Late Friday afternoon, school districts administrators across the state received an official letter from the Acting Deputy Secretary of Education, Sheri Smith, notifying districts of three important items. First, she announced President Biden's announced series of additional federal measures to help bring the pandemic under control. She also shared a threatening letter sent by the Secretary of Education (Noe Ortega) to a Pennsylvania school district who has openly not complied with the masking mandate issued by the Department of Health on August 31, 2021. Within the letter, it outlines some of, but not all of the consequences for the unnamed district if it does not comply with the masking mandate. Thirdly, Dr. Smith further clarified for all districts that, "Any school entity simply permitting a parent's sign-off without evidence that the student has a medical or mental health condition or disability that precludes the wearing of a face covering is not in compliance with the Order". Within this section, she references the consequences listed in the threatening letter issued to the unnamed district by Secretary Ortega.

It is assumed that the letter from Dr. Smith comes in response to an article written by the Associated Press which identified the parent affidavit option within the written mask order. As it is the first written notice from the Pennsylvania Department of Education notifying schools that they are out of compliance if accepting parental affidavit forms without accompanying, supporting medical documentation and the following of the Section 504 identification process, all school districts in the state must now move to follow those mandated processes. Therefore, Union School District will also be forced to comply with this mandate and shall require accompanying medical documentation as well as following of the Section 504 identification process. Please keep in mind that the Section 504 identification process is a rigorous process which is analogous to the identification of a student for special education services, but operates under the Americans with Disabilities Act, rather than through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. It is not easy to qualify for a Section 504 Plan.

Our district will continue to honor the parent affidavit forms through Friday, September 17, 2021 to allow parents and students sufficient time to acquire a physician's supporting medical documentation and to schedule a meeting with our district's 504 coordinator. Starting on Monday, September 20, 2021, all students who have not qualified and received a Section 504 Plan shall be required to follow the Department of Health's masking mandate while in school buildings and while being transported on school district provided buses/vans.

We realize how polarized the subject of masking of children in school has become, and we as a school district do not endorse one side of the argument or the other. Simply, we have done our best to provide parents the ability to choose what they feel is best for their own children, but we have now had that ability removed from our control. We ask that you recognize that our district's school board, administration, and staff have not developed the masking order, nor do we have the ability to ignore it. Therefore, anyone with questions concerning the order, feelings of disagreement with the order, general frustration with the

order, or contrarily, with words of support for the order, should direct those to the individuals who are responsible with its development and imposition. They are the people who have the ability to make changes, as that ability has been removed from your local leaders (school board and administration). Those who have been responsible for the masking mandate are as follows:

Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health – **Alison Beam** – phone number – **(717) 787-9857**

Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Education – **Noe Ortega** – phone number **(717) 783 – 9780**

Deputy Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Education – **Sheri Smith** – phone number **(717) 772 – 4557**

Governor Thomas Wolf – phone number - **(717) 787 – 2500**

We hope that you choose to continue to send your child to Union School District in compliance of the Department of Health’s masking order as in-person education has proven to be most effective. However, if you are considering alternative educational programming for your child as a result of the mask mandate, please contact your school district office to discuss your options. Currently, Union School District contracts with the following online education providers:

Educere Virtual Education
WIU eAcademy
Titusville Rockets Online Campus

We thank you for your continued support and understanding as our local school leaders give our best efforts to support our students and families. We hear your concerns and have made our best effort to continue to provide you with the ability to choose for your children. We wish you the best and good health in the days to come!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Kimmel', written in a cursive style.

John Kimmel, Superintendent