

Dear Chief School Administrator:

I hope this letter finds you, your family, and community safe and your schools secure. The start of this school year has been extraordinarily challenging and your continued leadership is appreciated.

A few brief updates ahead of the weekend --

- Late yesterday, President Biden announced a series of additional federal measures to help bring the pandemic under control. The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) and our partners in the Pennsylvania Department of Health and the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services are working to digest the Path Out of the Pandemic Action Plan; its implications for the commonwealth, including personnel who work under Federal programs; and next steps in our implementation role.
- On Wednesday, PDE issued a communication to a school district that has exhibited significant noncompliance with the Acting Secretary of Health's Face Coverings Order. While this letter responds to a specific set of circumstances in a single school entity, the cautions and conditions are broadly applicable to all school entities – both public and nonpublic.
- Relatedly, this Order is not a mask optional policy. 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. Under the Order, and as set forth in PDE's Answers to FAQs, school entities must require all individuals, two years of age and older, to wear face coverings unless the individual has a medical or mental health condition or disability that precludes the wearing of a face covering. In accordance with Section 3 of the Order, before an individual is excepted from the Order, all alternatives to a face covering, including a face shield, are to be exhausted. It is recommended that any exception be in accordance with eligibility under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act or IDEA for such medical or mental health condition or disability. School entities should follow their established processes for determining student eligibility under those laws, including any medical documentation that they would normally require. There are exceptions to the Order; however, a parent's opposition to the Order is not one of them.

Thank you for your continuing efforts during this challenging time.

-Sherri

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