

Alton Joins Ranks Of Masks Strongly Recommended, But Optional By 7-0 Board Vote

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON - Alton School District Superintendent Kristie Baumgartner provided details Wednesday morning of a Tuesday night decision by the School Board.

Dr. Baumgartner said the board voted 7-0 Tuesday night in a meeting to move from mask required, but "strongly recommended."

"Late this afternoon, the Illinois Joint Committee on Administrative Rules (JCAR) voted 9-0 to reject the extension of the Illinois emergency regulations for COVID-19 mitigations in schools," she explained. "These mitigations include masking for students and staff, testing requirements for staff, and exclusion for close contacts. Because the emergency regulations are now expired, student and staff mask requirements, employee vaccination/testing requirements and exclusion of close contacts can only occur through a court order or an order from the Madison County Health Department.

"Therefore, beginning on Wednesday, February 16, 2022, masks will now be strongly recommended for our students and staff, but not required, while at school. However, per federal mandate (not state mandate), **masks will still be required while on public school buses**. Any student riding a school bus will be required to wear a mask. Please also note that any students currently excluded as a close contact may return to school effective tomorrow.

"Please know that while we are shifting to masks being strongly recommended, the District is committed to continuing our mitigations and safety protocols in order to protect the learning environment to the highest degree possible."

Dr. Baumgartner explained specifically what Alton School District is doing with the changes:

- Providing KN95 masks for students and staff upon request
- Offering optional weekly COVID screenings at all schools
- Maintaining social distancing to the highest degree possible
- Promoting regular hand sanitizing
- Providing COVID vaccination and testing opportunities
- Layering in additional mitigation strategies for students and staff with underlying medical conditions

"With these changes in district procedures, the expectation beginning tomorrow will be to honor and respect each student and staff member's choice whether to wear a mask or not," she said. "Students should show respect regarding the masking choices of others and they should expect the same respect in return. Please take a moment to discuss these changes with your child and encourage their understanding and respect for those who choose to wear a mask/not wear a mask. Should your child experience any concerns, please immediately contact your school principal.

"Additionally, it will be imperative that students stay home when they are ill. If your child is symptomatic, please keep them at home until their symptoms have subsided and they have been fever-free for 24 hours. Together, we can better ensure the safety of our students and staff with these simple steps."

Dr. Baumgartner thanked parents and students for their cooperation with important changes that will be effective beginning Wednesday.

"Our priorities remain to provide a safe learning environment while supporting in-person learning to the highest degree possible," Dr. Baumgartner said. "We also must continue adhering to state and federal guidelines even when they change at a rapid pace such as this afternoon's decision.

"We would like to thank you for your continued patience, understanding and flexibility!"