



# Morgan County Schools

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## EVERY CHILD EVERY DAY

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August 18, 2021

Dear Morgan County Schools Family,

Summer has flown by quickly and the start of school is fast approaching. We all hoped that we could begin school "normally" without COVID-19 precautions in place, but unfortunately this will not be the case due to the recent surge of the Delta variant. I would like to update you on the most recent protocols in place.

Governor Justice has directed local school boards to work in conjunction with the local health departments to develop mitigation procedures. On Monday, August 9, the Berkeley-Morgan County Health Department (BMCHD) released a directive (latest version is attached to this post) which affects the use of face coverings in our schools. The levels of community transmission of COVID-19 are being monitored by the BMCHD daily and the status on Friday of each week will determine the face covering practices in place for all students, staff and visitors on Morgan County Schools property for the following week. When the transmission level is ranked in the "substantial" or "high" categories, masks will be required indoors. When the transmission level is ranked in the "low" or "moderate" categories masks will be highly recommended indoors, but not required.

While the decision from the health department to require masks if the levels of transmission are substantial or high is not what any of us hoped for, there are a few important points worth noting.

If students and staff are masked, the risk of quarantine and exposure is greatly reduced. This allows for consistency in education. Based on BMCHD guidelines, exposures requiring quarantine will only occur when someone is unmasked. Unmasked, unvaccinated staff and children exposed to COVID-19 would be quarantined for 7-10 days. Again, according to the health department directive, masks will only be **required** when local transmission rates are **substantial or high**. If levels are **low or moderate**, masks will be **highly recommended** by the health department.

**The mask requirements will only apply indoors, on buses or in areas where social distancing is limited. Masks will generally not be required when outside.**

Under the current guidance from the WVDE and the BMCHD, masks allow all staff and students to stay in school because there is little risk of exposure. Last year's quarantines, remote learning days and various schedules were not easy on students, staff or parents. We all know the importance of our students being in school every day. There are no plans from the WVDE or the BMCHD to close schools. We are all committed to opening schools on time, for a full day and keeping them open.

We have been able to have camps and activities all summer without issue. However, the cases of the Delta variant have been climbing over the last couple of weeks and sadly, there have been two deaths locally. It is unfortunate that the timing of this is so close to the start of the new school year, but we need to take this variant seriously and do what is necessary to lessen the community spread.

The health department's new procedure will begin immediately. The local COVID-19 levels each Friday will determine whether masks are required for the following week. The same protocol will be followed each week. **We will update the Morgan County Schools community as soon as we have information each week.**

We all want to be back to the pre-COVID normal and not be concerned with wearing a mask. I completely understand that. I'm tired of COVID too, believe me, I am, but we have endured and persevered through so much over the last year and a half. I am excited and grateful that things are going to be relatively back to normal this year, we just may have some weeks where we need to wear masks.

Kids are adaptable and I think we can all admit we've adapted and adjusted to many more difficult challenges over the course of this pandemic. We've all learned that we have to be flexible.

I encourage you to focus on the positives the new school year brings. Let's all be thankful that we are back in school for a full school day. Our kids can see their friends and teachers. Our cafeterias are open. Sports are in full swing. There's much excitement among our staff and students to get back at it! Be the positive support your children need and we are certainly going to do the same. We are a family in Morgan County and it takes all of us working together to get through the challenges and make things okay for our children.

As for me and my staff, masks or no masks we are going to focus on kids. There are much more pressing things at hand. I am not an expert on public health. For that, I rely on the health professionals. But, I do know how to educate our students and my team is ready to get back to work. The virus will continue to be a small part of our daily lives, but let's work together to stay positive and keep the focus on education.

Sincerely,



Kristen Tuttle  
Superintendent