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February 7, 2022

Dear Students and Families of the Philomath School District:

As many of you may have heard on the news this afternoon or evening, the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) announced [changes](#) in general **mask requirements** for indoor public spaces and schools. In short, the announcements are as follows:

- General mask requirements for public places **will** be lifted no later than March 31, 2022. Pending case rates and related variables, this change could take place earlier than the suggested.
- Indoor mask requirements for schools **may** change to optional status on March 31, 2022. (This decision will not take place any earlier than target date).

The March 31st target date was established based on current COVID transmission data, with cases still remaining high as of today. Indications suggest that this latest surge has peaked and will begin to recede.

Over the coming weeks, Oregon health officials will work with the Oregon Department of Education to update guidance to ensure schools can continue to operate safely and keep students in school in-person for as much time as possible. Thanks to student and staff adherence to protocols, we have been able to keep Philomath schools open for in-person learning.

This change in requirements will return decision making about masks to a local level. Beginning tomorrow, Philomath School District staff will begin engaging in conversations about implications and related plans. As with any other such changes we have experienced during COVID, we ask for your understanding as we work through the details. As you might imagine, there are a large number of considerations we must address. As we have done in the past, any decisions will be made collaboratively, as we have done in the past, with input from the Benton County Health Department.

On a related note, we have been made aware that some students may be planning a mask protest at school tomorrow, February 8th. The Instagram post, titled ***Oregon High Schools Unmask Our Kids***, suggests that students not wear the required face covering during school.

We have appreciated the adherence of our staff and students to the face-covering requirement. Our students have done a good job during this school year—even when they may not have wanted to do so. However, we cannot support or allow a mask-free walk-in by any number of students at any school. Whether viewed as fortunate or unfortunate, current mandates require all of us to wear masks inside our schools and district facilities. As has been our practice, schools will have masks available for students needing them.

With this in mind and with knowledge of today's OHA announcement, I am asking for your support in keeping our schools operating without unnecessary conflict. I understand the messages—on both sides of the mask requirement—without need for protest. Please know that students who refuse to put on an appropriate face covering, will not be allowed to remain in school.

Thank you for your continued support of our learning communities as we continue to learn together-

Susan