August 20, 2021

Dear Parents/Guardians:

I hope this letter finds you well. The Wallenpaupack Area School District's primary goal is to ensure our schools remain open and safe for our students and staff. For many of our students, remote learning presents barriers to their education such as Wifi access and specific learning needs. In addition, we believe it is critically important that schools remain open for our families who lack appropriate childcare for their children. Therefore, all decisions must be made in supporting the opening of schools safely, while limiting the possibilities of school closures.

In my previous correspondence from August 5, 2021, I outlined our return to school Health and Safety Plans for the 2021-2022 school year. In that letter I stated that masks would be strongly encouraged, yet not required. I, also, indicated that if local transmission of Covid increased within our community, that additional mitigation efforts would be necessary. In early August both Wayne and Pike Counties were in the moderate range of community transmission. Since then, both counties have experienced a significant increase in Covid cases and have remained in the “High” category of community transmission (the most elevated phase) for the past two weeks. It is with this in mind that all students, staff, and visitors of our schools will be required to wear masks indoor, regardless of vaccination status, beginning on Monday, August 23rd. This masking requirement will be in effect while either Pike or Wayne County falls within the substantial or high category of community transmission. The mask wearing requirement is in line with the guidance provided to us by the Pennsylvania Department of Health, Pennsylvania Department of Education, The Centers for Disease Control, The American Academy of Pediatrics, and our local health officials. It is our hope that the mask requirement will be temporary in nature. We will continue to monitor the Covid cases daily and communicate any changes to our plans on Fridays, when the Pennsylvania Department of Health and CDC update their weekly community transmission data.

As health officials learn more about Covid and its variants, updated information is being provided that helps us respond to instances of Covid-positive individuals in our schools. Persons who fall under the following exceptions would not need to quarantine IF they are symptom free:

- persons who are fully vaccinated (proof required)
- persons who have had COVID within the last three months (proof required)
- persons who tested positive for COVID antibodies-SARS-COV-2-IgG antibody test (proof required)
- In the K-12 indoor classroom setting, the close contact definition excludes students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student if both the infected student and exposed student(s) correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time.
Last school year, although challenging in many ways, was an overall success, as our schools remained open and face-to-face learning was provided throughout the school year. The Wallenpaupack staff and administration was beyond fortunate to feel the trust, support and understanding of our students, parents, and community. These feelings are what drove everyone to the level of success we experienced. At this time, we once again ask for the same trust, support and understanding shown last school year. We recognize that there are varied views and opinions on mask wearing, but I believe as a community, we all have the best interest of our children at heart—no one wants to see a child ill, especially if the illness could have been prevented. As Covid variants change and circumstances arise it may be necessary for additional mitigation efforts.

If you have specific building-level questions, please contact your child’s building principal. Thank you for your continued patience and understanding.

Stay well,

Keith E. Gunuskey, Superintendent