



MCD School Masking Letter

Minnesota Council on Disability
1600 University Ave. W. Unit 8
Saint Paul, MN 55104

August 23, 2021

Dear School Boards and Superintendents,

It is a civil right for our students with disabilities to have the best chance at a high-quality public education in a safe environment. Students who need in-person learning the most are the ones most at risk of COVID-19's effects. The reason this is not the focus of the conversation is because people with disabilities have not been at the center of society's policies and decision-making.

Society is at its best when we make policies with everyone in mind, especially those most impacted by our choices. We should not perpetuate the marginalization of people with disabilities by deprioritizing their needs. Masking is a simple way to protect others and allows for the greatest safety at schools, especially when vaccines are unavailable for those under 12 and some who cannot receive the vaccine due to their disability.

We have clear guidance from national and state public health officials that schools should have masking requirements in place. Boards and superintendents have the authority to implement these policies. According to Minnesota Department of Health data, Minnesota is over the 5% COVID-19 positivity rate benchmark, and our daily case rate is 70% higher than this time last year. The Delta variant is also significantly more likely to impact youth and twice as transmissible than the original COVID-19 strain. This is all happening while only 38% of Minnesotans 12-15 years old are fully vaccinated, and the percent of youth who get COVID-19 and need to be hospitalized has more than doubled.

Distance learning did not work for many students who receive Individualized Educational Program services. We owe our students the best possible chance of a safe, in-person school year for COVID-19 recovery education with full educational supports. We know optional masking will result in more students missing the education and supports they need and are legally entitled to receive.

Students with disabilities need a safe environment where they can attend school onsite to receive the services that schools are obligated to provide. By not requiring masks, you are contributing to an unsafe environment for students with disabilities and students who have family members with disabilities.

A masking-optional policy is implicitly telling students with disabilities and their families that they are not welcome in their own schools.

Sincerely,

/s/

E. David Dively, Executive Director

Additional Resources to Advocate for Students with Disabilities

A list of organizations who can help advocate for students with disabilities:

The Arc Minnesota: 833-450-1494

Minnesota Disability Law Center: 612-334-5970 or 1-800-292-4150

Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health (MACMH): 1-800-528-4511

PACER Center (Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights): 952-838-9000