

12/13/2021

To Boise School District Board of Trustees,

Thank you for your continued efforts to keep students, teachers, and staff protected throughout the pandemic. Your job is not easy, and your commitment is clear. It has been our pleasure to work with the Boise School District leadership during these difficult months.

BSD leadership has been discussing a possible change to the mask requirement from “masks required” to “masks recommended,” with a few potential starting dates. We are supportive of the Boise School District’s ongoing evaluation of its COVID-19 Response Plan, including consideration of the current mask requirement.

At this time, with a recent uptick in hospitalized patients, with the consistently high positive testing rates, the presence of the new Omicron variant confirmed in Idaho, and in accordance with current Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) guidelines, we feel that “masks required” is still the best option for the Boise School District.

It is important to review several factors when considering options to relax BSD masking requirements. Idaho has thankfully experienced a recent retreat from Crisis Standards of Care, but this is still relevant. Within our hospital systems, we are closely monitoring the number of patients admitted to the hospital with COVID-19, the prevalence of positive COVID-19 tests in our community, and availability of PPE for health care personnel. Unfortunately, the number of patients hospitalized with COVID-19 has increased slightly since the beginning of December, with the number in our Intensive Care Units rising as well.

We would also like to emphasize the importance of vaccination for students and staff.

With the Pfizer vaccine now approved for 5 to 11-year-old children, increased protection can be granted to those students who receive the vaccination. Of note, it takes 5-6 weeks to complete the initial vaccination process (first dose, three weeks between doses, and two weeks after the second dose to achieve full immunity). Consistent with guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics, families should be encouraged to vaccinate their school-aged children. In Idaho, so far only 12% of children ages 5-11 have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, with 5% fully vaccinated. For those ages 12-15, 39% are fully vaccinated; and for ages 16-17, 44% are fully vaccinated.

We understand you must weigh many factors in making decisions about the measures that will best serve students in your district and may change your plan to recommend rather than require masks. It remains important that the district continue the safety practices already implemented to help stop the spread of illness – physical distancing, hand washing, air hygiene, quarantining after exposure, and encouraging students and teachers to get vaccinated and stay home if they are sick. These are best practices to minimize illness and keep students and teachers in the classroom. In addition, in-school rapid COVID testing, which is being explored for students and staff, can be beneficial in identifying disease early to prevent further spread.

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These recommendations are based on current information and trends. Certainly, if there is a material change such as a new spike in COVID community spread or a significant concern with hospital resources, it would be critical for the board to remain flexible and to reconsider any masking policy change. We appreciate your continued efforts to evaluate these risks as you determine how best to serve families in the Boise School District.

Finally, we also want to emphasize that if you decide to pivot to "masks recommended," we are certainly willing to work with you and your leadership to make this as safe as possible. This partnership has been greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kenny Bramwell".

Kenny Bramwell, MD  
St. Luke's Children's Hospital and Service Line

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Nassir".

Mark Nassir, MD  
Saint Alphonsus Medical Group