

Subject: Face Coverings will be required at GMS and GHS

Dear Parent/Guardians,

Due to the current COVID numbers in our GMS/GHS school building, effective Friday, January 14, 2022 and continuing up to and including, Sunday, January 23, 2022. Students, staff and people entering the Girard Middle and High School campus will be required to wear protective face coverings. The wearing of face coverings during outdoor activities will be excluded. We will evaluate our current status with the Crawford County Health Department on Sunday, January 23, 2022 and make a determination moving forward regarding face coverings. Hopefully, we will meet the criteria to move back into a mask-optional climate on Monday, January 24, 2022.

Rationale: In regards to the COVID-19 pandemic, the USD 248 Board of Education's policy has been to follow the guidance and recommendation of the Crawford County Health Department in making health decisions in our school buildings. This practice is still in place. The Crawford County Health Department established benchmark data (see below) for their mask-optional vs. mask-required recommendations. Specifically, for a building to be recommended as a mask-optional, we would need to maintain a student/staff COVID absenteeism rate of 3%, or less. This percentage rate reflects the number of students who are absent from school because they have tested positive for COVID. For the past few weeks, we have met this criteria. However, in last few days, we have seen a tremendous spike in COVID positive cases and subsequent quarantines in our GMS/GHS campus and have exceeded the 3% absentee benchmark (See GMS/GHS data below). Right now, we need to do everything we can to keep our students and staff safe and to reduce the number of students who might be out of school due to COVID infections. As per the Crawford County Health guidelines, face coverings can positively impact the number of kids who may be placed into quarantine.

Rest assured, none of us want to require our students to wear face coverings, but we do want our students to be safe and in school for face-to-face instruction. The recommendations from the Crawford County Health Department has been the one constant for us in making decisions regarding COVID-19 since its inception. We recognize that there are differing opinions, but our policy has been and will continue to be to follow the recommendations of our local Health Department and Health Officer. We are asking for your patience and understanding as we strive to make the

best decisions possible regarding the safety and well-being of our students, staff and community.

CURRENT GMS/GHS STUDENT/STAFF COVID NUMBERS:

Staff/Student Absenteeism: **4%** (need to be 3%, or less)
 Positive Cases: 26 (**Note:** this number is used to figure the absentee %)
 Students Quarantined at home: 6
 Test to Stay: 51
 Total COVID impact: 83

CRAWFORD COUNTY BENCHMARK TO RECOMMEND MASK-OPTIONAL LEARNING:

Category	1 County incident rate	2 Trend in County incidence rate	3 Local / referring hospital capacity	4 Student/Staff absenteeism
Benchmark	<40 cases per week	Stable or decreasing over two weeks	20% or greater with regional referring capacity	Less than 3% absences related to COVID-19 in the educational building

Category 4 Defined:

Student/Staff Absenteeism due to COVID-19 is based on number of students enrolled plus staff level for each building. This category will require knowing the average attendance for each building, including staff. While the original gating criteria used only student information and included all causes for absenteeism, the evaluated category will only include absences for individuals who are COVID positive. The category will require less than 3.0% absenteeism to meet the criteria for mask-optional recommendation from the Health Officers. The benchmark allows for some infections in school but limits infections and absences to those related to COVID-19. Kansas law limits students to no more than 40 hours of out-of-school learning to maintain funding. Excess authorization is only allowed with by-name approval from the Department of Education. This is both cumbersome and costly to the schools. Category 4 is set to limit this impact on systems. Category 4 is evaluated daily and will be applied individually to each building in a school system. This would mean that a system may be mask-optional, but an individual school may be in universal masking due to local outbreak. This is done to minimize impact across systems when the true impact is only in one building.