

## Mask Opt-Out Update - Friday, Feb 11, 2022

Salem Students, Staff, and Families,

Today, we reviewed the number of new (reported) COVID-19 cases (22) in the division among staff and students during the previous week (Feb 3-Feb. 10). This represents approximately .5% (.005) of the total population of staff and students. We also reviewed attendance at each of our schools and are excited to report that overall attendance is approaching baseline. Finally, community transmission data is improving each day and is expected to be below .5% (.005) by Monday. When combined with the fact that almost 70% of Salem residents over five and over 90% of Salem residents over 65 are fully vaccinated, we will allow parents to opt their student(s) out of the division's mask requirements beginning on Monday, February 14. **Please be advised that masks continue to be required on school buses per federal regulations and that adults (staff and visitors) are still required to wear masks in schools during the school day.**

If you have already provided an opt-out letter for your student(s) you do not need to do anything further. We have recorded your preference in our Student Information System and teachers will be able to identify students in their classes who have opted out. If you have not provided a letter, and you would like to opt your student out of the division's mask requirement, please send a letter with your child indicating that you would like to opt-out of the division's mask requirement and include your student's name, grade, student number, and the signature of a parent or guardian. Please provide a separate letter for each student. Students should turn in their opt-out letters to their homeroom/first-period teacher. Students who do not have a first period should turn in their letters to the office when they arrive at school.

Please clearly communicate your expectations for mask use to your child. While we will have the ability to enforce mask use in classrooms for students who are not opted out, supervision before and after school, and during class changes will be more difficult. Make sure your student knows your expectations for mask use at school.

As we make this transition, every family must continue to do their part when it comes to monitoring students for illness. Please check your student each morning for signs of illness, keep them at home if they have any symptoms, and contact the school nurse to determine when they can return to school. Please do not assume that it is just a cold. Also, if someone in the home has symptoms, is diagnosed with COVID, or is waiting on the results of a COVID test, keep any SCS students home and contact the school nurse for guidance. This will help us prevent outbreaks and keep our schools open.

While I know that some of you may have concerns with the idea of allowing parents to opt their student(s) out of the mask requirement, I want to assure you that we are taking additional steps to support staff, students, and families. First, we have elected to participate in the VDOE/VDH Test-to-Stay program. As the name implies, this program will allow students who are identified as close contacts to remain at school by providing a negative test result each day during their quarantine period. This program is voluntary and requires consent from a parent. Second, we have a limited supply of KN95 face masks that we can provide to families who desire them but have trouble affording them. Please contact your school for more information about acquiring KN95 masks. Finally, we are hosting additional vaccination opportunities at Andrew Lewis

Middle School on February 25 and March 18 from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Please use the following link to register. [ALMS Vaccination Clinics](#)

Curtis Hicks  
Superintendent