

Executive Summary

The School Board of Broward County, FL (SBBC) continues to monitor local COVID-19 data and consider professional guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and local public health experts to inform its mitigation strategies and protocols. This includes the District's Face Coverings Policy 2170.

On September 22, 2021, Florida Department of Health's Emergency Rule, Protocols for Controlling COVID-19 in School Settings was repealed and replaced with 64DER21-15. This rule included two significant changes:

1. Schools may adopt requirements for students to wear masks or facial coverings as a mitigation measure: however, the school must allow for a parent or legal guardian of the student to opt the student out of wearing a face covering or mask at the parent or legal guardian's sole discretion; and,
2. Schools shall allow parents the authority to choose how their child receives education after having been in direct contact with an individual that is positive for COVID-19 as long as the child is asymptomatic OR quarantine no more than 7 days after Direct contact with a person who has tested positive.

At its recent Workshop on October 5, 2021, the School Board maintained its current position to mandate facial coverings and follow the quarantine protocol from the previous Emergency Rule, 64-DER21-12 considering current COVID-19 data and guidance from public health experts. The School Board also asserted that it would again reconsider its face covering policy once the following two thresholds were met within Broward County: (1) the County has reached a 66% vaccination rate; and (2) the COVID-19 positivity rate is 3% or lower within the County for 10 consecutive days.

As of Sunday, October 24, 2021, both thresholds were achieved. The County reached a 66% vaccination previously. The vaccination rate for the County is currently 82% and the County's positivity rate has been at or below 3% for over 10 days. (See the table below for the positivity rates.)

Broward County % Positive COVID-19 Test Results

10/15/ 2021	10/16/ 2021	10/17/ 2021	10/18/ 2021	10/19/ 2021	10/20/ 2021	10/21/ 2021	10/22/ 2021	10/23/ 2021	10/24/ 2021
3.0%	2.8%	2.4%	2.9%	2.9%	2.7%	2.4%	2.3%	2.5%	2.2%

Options for Moving Forward with Face Coverings

1. **Maintain Existing Facial Coverings Protocol** – This is not recommended given that Broward County has achieved the gating criteria to enter Phase 3 of its Re-Opening Plan. Phase 3 calls for the lifting of all face covering requirements and the elimination of all other COVID-19 restrictions.
2. **Adopt the Face Coverings Protocol Established by the September 22, 2021 DOH Emergency Rule** – This is not recommended. Although this approach will address the District's compliance with the DOH emergency rule, it will also create additional burden for staff to develop an opt-out process. Further it will be difficult to enforce because staff at schools will not necessarily know which parents "opt out" or not. Additionally, if the decision for opt-out is at the discretion of the parent, even if a student who has not previously opted out chooses to not wear the face covering, it will only take the parent's approval to address any noncompliance.
3. **Strongly Encourage Face Coverings but Make Them Optional and Reimplement Required Face Coverings Usage if Broward County has 5% or Higher Positivity Rate for 10 Consecutive Days AND Follow the Florida Department of Health Emergency Rule for Quarantining** – This is the recommended approach. Face coverings usage is consistent with the recommendation staff made prior to the "spike" in positivity caused by the Delta Variant. This recommendation aligns with Broward County Government's criteria for reimplementing restrictions if there is a 5% or higher positivity rate for 10 consecutive days. Currently, most of the Very Large Districts are following the Department of Health's Emergency Rule for quarantining. Option 3 has the least administrative burden for enforcement and documentation.
4. **Adopt Different Strategies for Different Levels and Reimplement Required Face Covering Usage if Broward County has 5% or Higher Positivity Rate for 10 Consecutive Days AND Follow the Department of Health's Emergency Rule for Quarantining** – This is not recommended. Acknowledging the fact that students below the age of 12 are currently not approved for the COVID-19 vaccine, this approach will be very confusing to parents at schools with students that are in both age cohorts. Additionally, if age is the criteria, it raises the question on face covering usage for staff. If we require staff to wear face coverings at select school levels, there will be different working conditions for staff. This recommendation aligns with Broward County Government's criteria for reimplementing restrictions if there is a 5% or higher positivity rate for 10 consecutive days. Currently, most of the Very

Large Districts are following the Department of Health's Emergency Rule for quarantining. (See the table below for the current status of Very Large Districts in Florida.)

Mask Mandate Policies; Top Florida Districts as of 10/25/21	Mandatory/Optional	Medical Exemption (Y/N)	Following New FDOH Quarantining Guidance (64DER21-15)
Broward County Public Schools	Mandatory	YES	NO
Duval County Public Schools	Mandatory but considering revision	YES	YES
Hillsborough County Public Schools	Optional	YES	YES
Miami-Dade County Public Schools	Mandatory	YES	NO
Orange County Public Schools	Mandatory thru 10/30 then optional	YES	YES
Palm Beach County School Public Schools	Mandatory but gating criteria met on 10/22	YES	YES
Pinellas County Public Schools	Optional	NO	YES
Polk County Public Schools	Optional	NO	YES

Given the current conditions, it is recommended the District eliminate its face covering mandate at this time and follow the Florida Department of Health's Emergency Rule regarding quarantining, but continue to strongly encourage the use of face coverings and quarantining practices to avoid any "spikes" in positivity and until such time as the COVID-19 pandemic is no longer a community health risk.