



The “Why” Behind the Mask

As debate over the effectiveness of masks and/or shields in the prevention and spread of COVID19 continues, school leaders have been charged with paving a way for a safe reentry of students and staff members into our classrooms. In their demonstration of compassion and grace, the Florida Department of Education has given districts and charter schools the ability to make individual choices based upon the needs of our communities and our individual schools.

As school leaders we have been charged with determining the needs and not only paving a way for a safe reentry of students and teachers into our classrooms, but implementing policies that increase our ability to keep our classrooms and campus open each and every day of this school year!

After speaking with stakeholders over the past several months, it has become clear that there are very strong opinions on both sides of this debate. What matters is what the requirements will be in the event of a student or staff member testing positive for COVID19, requirements not set by MCAA, but mandated by our state and local health departments.

In the event that a student or staff member is identified as testing positive for the virus, contact tracing will begin immediately. This investigative procedure is launched and carried out by health department officials. Multiple factors, including the practice of social distancing and the use of masks and/or shields will be taken into consideration when determining whether individual students, individual classes, or the school as a whole will be quarantined for a minimum of two weeks. Realistically, based upon cases we have seen thus far within our own school community, we may be faced with this scenario multiple times throughout the school year. Further, the potential return to distance learning creates continued instability and uncertainty.

We all agree that it is of utmost importance to keep our students safe; however, it is also imperative that we keep our teachers and staff members safe. Should a teacher contract the virus and experience a lengthy absence, the potential long reaching effects on student achievement could be immeasurable. Our teachers have willingly accepted the challenges of this school year along with the added duties, responsibilities, and anxieties that it brings with it. As administrators and parents it is our responsibility to consider their welfare in the decision making process.

To some masks and/or shields are an inconvenience; however, in our classrooms where students cannot feasibly distance themselves from each other or their teacher, the masks are an added layer of protection, an added layer of protection that can keep all students and staff members safe and in classrooms. As school leaders, we have had to put our own personal views and conveniences aside and look at a wider view that encompasses a multitude of factors when mandating masks in our reopening plan. We fully understand the challenges that this policy brings. We've heard parent voices, we've listened to their concerns, we've wept with them, and we look forward to celebrating with them when our masks are removed!

We've taught our students that we can do hard things. We know this is a hard thing, but we also know that we can do this together! To help unite us in this effort, the Parent and Teacher Club will supply each student and staff member with a mask that is appropriately sized for children and proudly displays our panther athletic logo. In addition, students are welcome to supply their own masks reflecting their own individuality as long as they are school appropriate. As a note, student schedules and teacher plans will allow for extended periods throughout the day when students can remove their masks in a safe environment.

I would like to ask you to trust your leadership and focus on the brighter side. In a few short weeks we will have the opportunity to once again share our days with our students in the same space! This is an opportune time to unite and celebrate!

Respectfully,

Janna Barris