

Weston Public School Mask-Optional FAQ

What Is Required For Weston High School to Become a Mask-Optional Building?

On November 22, 2021 the Weston School Committee approved a proposal for Weston High School to become mask optional when the following criteria are met, and as early as December 6, 2021:

- Vaccination rate of staff and students meets 80%
- 65% of students and staff participate in weekly pooled testing
- Town of Weston is in the “green” for Covid incidence, meaning 15 or fewer positive cases identified in the town
- Less than 10 district cases identified the prior week
- No in-school spread

Why is Weston Requiring More than Just the 80 percent Vaccination Rate Identified by DESE To Become Mask Optional?

In guidance issued on October 26, 2021, DESE provided that a district could apply for an exemption from the mask requirement in a school if at least 80 percent of students and staff in the building are vaccinated, however “Lifting the mask mandate through the vaccination threshold is a local decision made by school and district leaders.” Weston’s medical team relied on its experience keeping students and faculty safe last year in devising a plan intended to prevent the spread of disease in Weston High School. Our metric was vetted and supported by the Weston Board of Health. The goal is not simply to react once disease is found, but rather to prevent members of the school community from becoming infected, while at the same time ushering in a return to normalcy.

Where did the Metrics Being Used By the District Come From?

The district medical team used its experience from the past year to create metrics it believes are both achievable and give us the best possible chance of preventing spread of COVID-19 within our school.

65%: Last spring, students and staff regularly tested at a rate of 65% or higher.

10 Cases: The threshold of 10 cases in a week is based on the Massachusetts Department of Public Health’s and Department of Education’s classification of risk in communities. Average daily case rates per 100,000 over a two week period determine the color coding for a community

and assist Local Boards of Health to identify community risk. Within a school district, it remains important to trend local test positivity rates weekly as this assists the district and Local Board of Health to identify risk. Historically when higher levels of incidence are identified in a district, the town incidence also increases.

What are Districts Around Weston Requiring to Become Mask-optional?

It is not yet known what criteria districts around Weston will use to determine whether to become mask-optional. Neighboring high schools in Newton, Wellesley, Wayland, Lincoln-Sudbury, Concord and Lexington have similar vaccination rates to Weston, and remain in the process of developing their plans. Many have stated an intent to wait to take any action on masking until January 15, 2022, when DESE decides whether to extend its general mask mandate in schools.