



SCHOOL DISTRICT OF THE CHATHAMS

Office of the Superintendent

Michael LaSusa

mlasusa@chatham-nj.org

259 Lafayette Avenue, Chatham, NJ 07928

(973) 457-2501

February 17, 2022

Dear Parent or Staff Member,

I write to update you on several items as we approach our winter break.

First, masks will become optional for all students and staff in all schools beginning Monday, March 7. There are a few points of note in terms of mask optionality:

1. The New Jersey Department of Education has informed us that as of today masks remain a requirement on school buses. If your child utilizes district transportation to and from school, or to and from athletic or extracurricular events, please ensure they have a mask, as they will be required to wear one. I am hopeful that this will change and that the rules for buses will soon align with the rules for school facilities, but as of today that is not the case. As soon as this changes, I will notify you.
2. The school district will not be responsible for monitoring children whose parents want them to wear a mask. In other words, if a parent expects their child to wear a mask at school, then the child will be the one who must fulfill that expectation. We do not have the ability to continually track and police who should and who should not be in a mask based on parent preferences.
3. We know that come March 7, some students and staff will not wear a mask. We know that other students and staff will continue to wear a mask. And we know that yet other students and staff will wear a mask occasionally, like perhaps when they are in a crowded space or restroom. Whatever one chooses to do is all good and our schools will reinforce with students that “mask optional” means that everyone can make their own choice without feeling self-conscious or worried about what others might think.
4. The one spot in our schools where masks will be required is in our nurse’s offices when students present with symptomatic illness. For example, if a student scrapes their knee at recess and heads to the nurse’s office for a bandage, that student would not need to mask up. But if a student is coughing and complaining of chills, that student would be given a mask while the nurse is

working with them. This is to help ensure the health of our nursing staff and other children who may be in the nurse's office.

And now onto better news! Back in 2017, the Chatham Education Foundation sponsored a visit to our school district from Maggie Doyne. Ms. Doyne, or Maggie, grew up in Mendham and decided to take a gap year in Nepal after graduating from high school in 2005. Moved by the poverty and suffering she witnessed there as the result of a recent civil war, Maggie decided to remain in Nepal to help children, particularly those orphaned by warfare. She went on to found a school and orphanage in Kopila Valley. She has dedicated the last 17 years of her life to helping others, and received the 2008 CosmoGirl of the Year Award, the 2013 Forbes Excellence in Education Award, and the 2015 CNN Hero of the Year award.

Maggie is returning to the United States to promote her debut memoir entitled *Between the Mountain and the Sky: A Mother's Story of Hope and Love*. Maggie has offered to speak at Chatham High School on Thursday, March 31, at 7:00 pm. Her talk will take place in the CHS Performing Arts Center and admission will be free of charge. We are excited to invite you to this special event!

Finally, I have recently provided updates at our Board of Education meetings about plans to alter the start-times at our schools. You may view [these presentations](#) on our website. At our next meeting, on February 28, Dr. Bert Mandelbaum will join us to offer his expertise on this subject. Dr. Mandelbaum is Chairman of the Department of Pediatrics at the University Medical Center at Princeton and coordinates care between that medical center and the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. Dr. Mandelbaum is an expert in adolescent and pediatric sleep needs, and has been involved in the shift to later high school start times in other districts in New Jersey, such as Princeton and Millburn. We are delighted to have Dr. Mandelbaum join us on February 28.

I hope that you and your children are able to enjoy a staycation or vacation of some sort next week. Almost immediately upon our return, we will greet the month of March, the start of our spring athletic season, the CHS spring musical, and daylight savings time! As a reminder, tomorrow is also a scheduled early dismissal for all students for staff professional development. THANK YOU for your flexibility and support of our schools to this point of the year. I am looking forward to a terrific spring.

Sincerely,

Mike LaSusa