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Superintendent Thomas Anderson

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## **New Bedford Public Schools to make masks optional, March 7**

*Mask protocol change follows state and City of New Bedford's lifting of mask mandate  
In-school Test and Stay Program to be replaced with at-home test kits, starting Feb. 28*

New Bedford Public Schools will be updating its COVID-19 protocols including making masks optional starting Monday, March 7, 2022 for students and staff, as well as aligning COVID-19 testing procedures more closely with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Department of Public Health, Superintendent Thomas Anderson announced today in a letter to parents, guardians and caregivers.

“In lieu of the current in-school Test and Stay program, we will be participating in an at-home testing program that will help maximize testing for participating students and staff, despite their vaccination status,” Superintendent Anderson noted, adding, “This at-home testing option will begin during the week of February 28, 2022 and we will continue with school symptomatic testing for students who become ill during the school day. We will no longer use the Test and Stay Program and will not conduct contact tracing for in-school close contacts. This new at-home testing opportunity is voluntary and parents must sign-up to receive the tests.”

To receive the free antigen tests kits, parents/guardians must opt-in to the at-home testing program by completing an opt-in form for each child by Friday, February 25, 2022. Forms are available online at [newbedfordschools.org](http://newbedfordschools.org). For additional information, please contact your school or the NBPS Health Services Department at 508-997-4511, extension 14432.

Of his decision to lift the mask requirement while also making optional their continued use, Superintendent Anderson stated, “Last week Governor Baker and education Commissioner Riley lifted the state-wide mask mandate for schools. In consideration of this change to current mask mandate, we have evaluated several factors, including virus transmission rates, vaccination information for eligible students and adults, and the impact on student social emotional well-

being. We have several mitigation strategies in place that will mostly continue including the over 900 air exchange units in our buildings and cleaning and disinfecting processes.

“Over the last few days I have received consistent overwhelming feedback from parents, some students, and staff suggesting that we also lift the mask mandate. To allow us time to transition to our new testing program and provide some time after the February Break due to past increased positivity rates in the days immediately following holidays and/or vacations, the mask mandate for New Bedford Public Schools will end at the end of the school day on Friday, March 4 - except on school busses and in health offices. Federal guidelines still require all individuals to wear masks while on school busses and State guidelines still require all individuals to wear masks while in health offices.

“Beginning Monday, March 7, mask wearing will become optional for all New Bedford Public Schools students and staff. I do highly encourage those unvaccinated individuals with compromised immune systems to continue wearing their masks. These 5-days after we return from February Break will provide us time to address any increase in positive COVID cases and gives us time to transition our health department team to the new testing process. Please know that there will be some students and staff who personally choose to continue wearing a mask. I request that we support one another and understand that some individuals are working through personal situations where COVID has impacted their family members, friends or themselves. Now is a time to be supportive and understanding – let’s please be respectful of those who choose to continue wearing a mask during the school day.”

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