

Preparing for the Masks to Come Off:

Creating a culture of compassion and kindness that will help ALL through this latest transition

Resources, Issues, and Ideas

1. Video Newsclip featuring Dr. Maurice Elias – well worth the watch!

<https://abc7ny.com/video/embed/?pid=11544673>

2. Concerns raised by attendees at the SSN meeting held on February 16th

Teacher and staff roles regarding mask compliance

- Parent permission standpoint – what is the teacher's responsibility?
- What is the staff's role if parents want their child to wear the mask? Who monitors this? How does the staff member track compliance?
- Can a staff member ask a child to wear a mask if they are working in close proximity and/or one-on-one?
- Concerns from staff that are high-risk and need to continue wearing a mask
- How will students react to staff who continue wearing masks?

Impact of disciplinary approaches

- HIB/disciplinary issues – informing students and staff members of impact of behavior
- How will students and staff react to other students and staff members continuing to wear a mask?

Issues regarding wearing masks when required in other settings but not at school

- Busing – masks required on the bus but not required at school – how do we explain this to students?

Students anxiety

- Students are worried about:
 - Contracting Covid
 - Peer pressure (they are making a different decision than their friends)
 - Feeling uncomfortable due to the grief they experienced of losing a loved one vs those who have not experienced a loss
- Feeling insecure about showing their faces; self-esteem issues
- Students being unsure of how to look at each other without masks and how to show emotions without their mask

Policies / Procedures / Protocols

- Can we work in small groups again?
- Will classes start to mix more and do activities together?
- Will assemblies and large group activities resume? What will that look like?
- Contact tracing protocols and requirements during mask optional
- Quarantine requirements during mask optional

3. Ideas generated from the SSN meeting to address the above

- Adopt a phased-in approach – begin with mask removal then move to larger group work and lessening of other safety protocols
- Build empathy and understanding of different personal experiences
- Have staff model behavior – if a student chooses to wear a mask, then the staff member wears a mask when working one-to-one with that student
- Have staff/building leadership model different approaches (some wear masks, others do not)
- Begin discussing the change in morning meetings – have students and staff start thinking about how they feel about the change
- Survey parents to start to get information on mask preferences
- Focus on healthy habits – continuing to wash hands, healthy eating, exercise, adequate sleep

4. What can schools do now?

Be ready for a complicated couple of weeks

- Kindness and compassion can help – take a trauma-informed approach to everything!
- Agree ahead of time on a consistent approach to discipline and messaging
- Form a school/district team (or task an existing team) with coordinating the effort
 - Draft responses to anticipated frequently asked questions teachers and staff may be asked
 - Clarify the disciplinary response to mask compliance and related behavior
 - Identify areas that still need clarification – help create action plans to get clarity
 - Coordinate the communication plan
- Plan some fun activities to help bring the anxiety down

Talk about it!

- Encourage conversations – *in classrooms, at staff meetings, and with each other*
 - How do people (staff, students, and parents) anticipate feeling?
 - Do they have any concerns – are they worried or are they happy and excited or both?
 - How can they support friends, family members, colleagues, and classmates (whatever each individual chooses)?
 - Get specific – discuss/explain why someone might (*or might not*) choose to wear a mask – build empathy!
- Have students write (or draw or create!) about their feelings and experiences throughout
 - Have students identify things that have been good, difficult, weird, silly, etc.

Communication and managing expectations are key!

- Communicate with parents, staff, and the school community
- One size does not fit all – each school/district is different
- Each individual's experience has been vastly different – embrace, acknowledge, and respect the different experiences and decisions people will be making
- Support staff by helping them anticipate conversations and situations that may arise in their classroom

Responding to and preparing for change

- Acknowledge that the world offered more stability and predictability in the past
- Deeply understand what the brain threat response causes:
 - Acute stress reaction
 - Increased stress and anxiety
 - Altered perception of reality (“heightened antennae”)
 - Decreased working memory functioning
 - Ruminating negative thoughts
- Proactive Responses
 - Any news is helpful – regular and positive communications
 - Be aware that stress and anxiety could be drivers of staff and student behavior