



**Office of the Superintendent**  
Billings Public Schools  
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Dear Parents and Guardians:

In light of the swift pace the Omicron variant is moving in our community, causing a rapid increase of COVID cases impacting our schools, we will continue with our current masking requirements. It was with great anticipation that we were poised to welcome optional masking, but the trajectory of the current cases requires us to remain vigilant as we work through this wave.

As I have previously explained, I monitor weekly SD2 COVID cases in conjunction with the Yellowstone County Schools Weekly Report, and meet with our local health officials. No single metric determines masking or no masking; rather it is an analysis of multiple data points and seeking the input of our community medical officials to provide guidance as decisions are made. For your reference, I am including our Masking Evaluation Process below, which was publicly shared on September 2, 2021; our current SD2 COVID weekly case counts (attached); and the most recent Yellowstone County Schools Weekly Report (attached).

***Masking Evaluation Process:*** *The following criteria will be reviewed on a weekly basis for evaluating the status of the SD2 masking mandate.*

- a. Local health officials COVID-19 information updates.*
- b. The total number of Yellowstone County (school age) active cases.*
- c. The total number of Yellowstone County (all age) active cases.*
- d. Current health care capacity.*
- e. Yellowstone County positivity rates.*
- f. Yellowstone County daily case counts per 100K.*
- g. Total number of SD2 cases per individual school.*

I ask that we all refocus our efforts in optimizing our ability to continue providing critical in-person instruction and extracurricular activities. As you may be aware, other schools across Montana are experiencing COVID related staff shortages to the point of placing schools into remote learning settings. We are doing everything we can to avoid being placed in a remote learning environment. You can help us by practicing socially distancing, washing hands frequently, and masking when appropriate.

If we do have to place a school or schools into a *temporary* remote instructional setting because of student and/or staff illness, the building principal will communicate the procedures for checking out technology and any other necessary educational resources. Your student's teacher will also be communicating attendance and learning expectations with you or your student via their normal communication methods. In addition, if a school is placed into a remote instructional environment, a daily Grab and Go meal (which includes a breakfast and lunch) will be provided by Sodexo at each school. More detailed information will be provided should this situation arise.

Thank you for your attention and support in this important matter.

Most Respectfully,

Superintendent Upham