



SAN RAMON VALLEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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February 24, 2022

Mark Ghaly, MD
Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services
1600 9th Street, Suite 460
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dr. Ghaly,

We write to you on behalf of the Board of Education in San Ramon Valley Unified School District (SRVUSD) and the more than 30,000 students we serve, urging you to lay out a clear plan and pathway to make the current masking requirement in schools optional.

From the outset and to this day, we respect the complexity of the situation that everyone faces to identify the metrics that will allow schools to lift the current masking mandate. **We implore you to take the bold steps necessary to provide us with explicit direction and clear metrics regarding masking** so we can move forward, support our students and return our full attention to teaching and learning.

We have and continue to follow the guidance set forth by the California Department of Public Health, which we have recognized as the legal authority for setting direction on this matter since the beginning of the pandemic. We are not experts in the field of public health. We are the experts, however, in education, and masking is imposing tremendously on the education of our students – compromising student learning, their social and emotional well-being, and taxing school site operations.

Our school community is vastly aware that the mask mandate has been lifted for entering a restaurant, going to a movie, participating in public events and more, while our students and staff must continue to wear a mask in school. Continuing to enforce masking rules without providing students and staff the option to remove their masks is becoming untenable.

We urge you to include in the school masking announcement on February 28th **clear and explicit direction and a path forward** so we can address challenges noted below. We ask this on behalf of our students, our dedicated staff and our entire school community, who all want their voices heard.

When the California Department of Public Health deems it safe, masking should be optional for these reasons:

Academic Integrity and Effectiveness – As the saying goes, first you learn to read, then you read to learn. It is terribly challenging to teach young learners letters, sounds and phonics when the teacher and students are masked. While this challenge may be most pronounced for our youngest learners, it is also a tremendous barrier for our English Language Learners and our students with special needs - and this population represents approximately 15% of our more than 30,000 students. Masks can make teaching and learning difficult for all staff and students.

Optimizing District Resources for Student Learning and Social-Emotional Well-Being – As stated, neither our Board of Education nor our staff professes to be experts in public health, but we do know education. To this point, we find that enforcing the masking requirement in K-12 settings, when it is lifted in so many other areas of public life indoors, is diverting school staff and administrator time from teaching and learning to mask compliance management. This is a poor use of taxpayer-funded time, talent and energy that should be focused purely on student learning and social-emotional well-being.

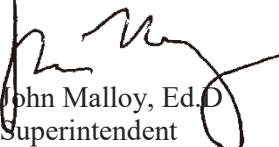
Retaining Our Education Professionals – At a time when educator burnout is real and at an all-time high, we need to liberate our support staff, teachers and administrators from mask management and enforcement. By giving us a clear path to removing the mask mandate, and thereby being able to offer students and staff the option to wear a mask should they so choose, you would provide our District’s dedicated professionals the freedom they need from reinforcing this mandate, and begin to refocus all of their energy on the education of our students.

Every Voice, Their Choice – We are hearing from parents, employees and students across our District, and we hear all points of view on masking and COVID mitigation; some feel safer masking, others do not want to wear or have their children wear masks any longer. We listen to all of the diverse voices and are asking you to do the same, and provide clear direction so that our communities know the exact date and/or the exact parameters and metrics under which they can be offered a choice.

While there are many opinions on the matter of masking, there are things that clearly unite us: we all worry about learning disparities and the gaps in social and emotional growth. Most of all, we know so many of our parents and caregivers worry about their children – our students – and the toll this is taking on them.

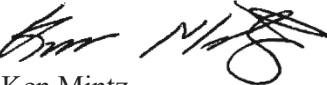
With the greatest urgency, we share with you the voice of our school community and ask that on Monday, February 28th, you announce plans and clear metrics to lift the masking mandate when you deem it safe to do so, making it optional for our students and staff.

Respectfully,



John Malloy, Ed.D.
Superintendent

San Ramon Valley Unified School District



Ken Mintz
Board of Education President

San Ramon Valley Unified School District

CC The Honorable Gavin Newsom, Governor, State of California
The Honorable Tony Thurmond, Superintendent of Public Instruction
Brooks Allen, Executive Director, State Board of Education
The Honorable Steven Glazer, Member of the Senate
The Honorable Rebecca Bauer-Kahan, Member of the Assembly
Tomas Aragon, MD, Director, California Department of Public Health
Candace Andersen, Contra Costa County Supervisor
Ori Tzvieli, MD, Public Health Officer, Contra Costa Health Services
Lynn Mackey, Contra Costa County Superintendent of Schools
Board of Education Trustees, San Ramon Valley Unified School District
Dr. John Malloy, Superintendent, San Ramon Valley Unified School District