



Avella Area School District

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Dear Avella Families,

As many of you know, last week Governor Tom Wolf announced a mask mandate for all public and private schools in the state of Pennsylvania. Starting Tuesday, September 7, all students, staff and faculty are required to wear face coverings.

I have many unanswered questions, as I am sure you do as well. For now, all we know is that this mandate is in place. For how long? We don't know. It has been previously reported, statistics are showing that cases of COVID-19 are slowing, which may indicate we may have reached a peak and cases will subside.

Is this mandate in some ways unenforceable or unconstitutional? The simple answer is no. Our school district receives state and federal funding. As such, we have to play by their rules or risk shutting our doors. As with many of these orders, there is likely to be some litigation challenging Gov. Wolf's decision. Until the mandate is either overturned by the courts or released by Gov. Wolf and the Pennsylvania Department of Health, our solicitor and the Pennsylvania School Boards Association are reminding us of "our legal obligation to this directive."

I want to be clear that Gov. Wolf's decision is not something that was supported by a majority of the Avella School Board or the Pennsylvania School Boards Association. We feel that parents, who know the risks of COVID-19, can make the best decision for their families.

Over the past several days, we have heard from many of you who are angry, disappointed, frustrated, exasperated and exhausted. We share some of these same emotions with you; however as a school district, we are required to follow federal, state, and Department of Education mandates and orders. We are asking each of you for your patience, understanding and grace during this period because our school district is in a precarious position.

When students leave our small district to attend charter schools or online academies, Avella loses. Not only does this have ripple effects on our school's culture, but it also financially impacts the district. When a child departs our district, Avella sends thousands of dollars to help pay tuition and fees at cyber schools and charter programs. These are dollars we would have invested into our district. If too many children leave our district, financial losses will proliferate. If spending is not corrected, the State of Pennsylvania begins asking questions about the sustainability of our district.

For as long as I have been here, the Avella School District has helped connect our community. As one of our board members often says, Avella offers a "boutique educational experience" and serves our community in a number of ways. Our test scores remain some of the highest and strongest in our county. Our teachers remain dedicated to serving the children you entrust to us. We understand that this is a trying time, but we hope that you will grant us the patience and the support so that we may get through this together. Avella is stronger together.

Sincerely,

Cyril Walther, Superintendent