



C-S PRESS RELEASE REGARDING MASK MANDATE

On August 23, 2021 the Climax-Scotts School Board of Education held a special meeting to discuss the recent mandate handed down by the Kalamazoo County Health Department that required masks to be worn by K-6 students throughout all of Kalamazoo County. Many of our community members were in attendance and many took the opportunity to discuss this mandate during the open comment session. While differing opinions and facts were presented, an overwhelming majority said that this mandate was not right for C-S Schools and that their hope would be to make masks optional for all children, but not mandatory. Our Board of Education believes that we are this community's voice and that we would be doing our community a disservice by not echoing the sentiments of such a large majority, especially when we believe the evidence and supportive information is on our side. As such, we voted by a 6-0 margin to make masks optional at Climax-Scotts Schools for our K-6 students.

Following this vote, our superintendent and two members of our BOE were able to meet with select members of the Kalamazoo County Health Department which included Director Jim Rutherford. Because our vote to make masks optional contradicts the order made by the Kalamazoo County Health Department, we needed to understand what our next steps were and if our vote would be taken under consideration due to what we believe are mitigating and differentiating factors (small class sizes, social distancing, lower COVID-19 positivity rate in our area, etc.). Unfortunately, the Kalamazoo County Health Department said that the order mandating masks for K-6 students would not be modified on a case-by-case basis for certain schools and that C-S would be violating the order if we proceeded with a mask optional policy for our K-6 students. Violation of the order would expose C-S Schools and Administrators to criminal and civil liability. In addition, our greatest fear is that willful violation of this order will result in our K-6 School facing additional legal consequences that would keep our kids out of school which goes against our main goal throughout this entire pandemic - to offer in-person learning for all of our C-S students.

The Kalamazoo Health Department makes clear that their mission is to protect the public health and they believe that this order does just that and it is in everyone's best interest. They also believe that the School District's mission is to educate and care for our students the best way that we as a district know how. We believe that our district does an amazing job of educating and caring for our students thanks to our exceptional teachers, staff, administrators, students, parents, and community members. Climax-Scotts is a special place and the thought of having our school shut down and depriving our students of a learning environment does not achieve our goal of educating students, in-person throughout this pandemic.

At a second special board meeting on August 26, our BOE voted 5-0 to follow the Kalamazoo County Health Department mandate. Going forward, our hope is to use the information and suggestions made by Health Department officials during our August 24th meeting to collaborate with our administrators and teachers so that we can make our students' learning experience the best that is possible under these difficult circumstances.

Resources:

- 8/18/21 The Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services Department Public Health Mask Order [Read the full order here](#).
- Further guidance was provided to Kalamazoo County Superintendents on August 24, 2021 regarding the Public Health Mask Order issued on August 18, 2021. [Read the additional guidance here](#).