Dear School Board Members:

As a family physician who provides care to children, teachers and parents of your school district, I write to urgently request that the school board act to bring the district’s masking policies in line with CDC guidance on masking in schools.

On August 5, 2021, CDC recommendations were updated and now support universal masking for all teachers, staff, students and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/index.html). These CDC recommendations relative to universal indoor masking by all students (age 2 and older) reflect concern over the widely circulating and highly contagious B.1.617.2 Delta variant. The new guidance is also in response to data that suggest fully vaccinated individuals are able to transmit the delta variant to those who are immunocompromised or not vaccinated, including children under 12 years of age.

The Ohio Academy of Family Physicians, in addition to its parent organization, the American Academy of Family Physicians, as well as the American Academy of Pediatrics, support CDC’s guidance on universal masking in K-12 schools. Ohio schools serve many children under the age of 12 who are not eligible for vaccination at this time. In addition to universal indoor masking, CDC recommends schools maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classrooms to reduce transmission risk. Screening testing, ventilation, handwashing and respiratory etiquette, staying home when sick and getting tested, contact tracing in combination with quarantine and isolation, and cleaning and disinfection are also important layers of prevention to keep schools safe. Layered prevention strategies protect students, teachers, staff, visitors, and other members of their households so that in-person learning can occur. Masking, however, is key.

As it currently stands, the Ohio Department of Health’s guidance on masking in schools is weak and outdated. As students return to the classroom this fall, local school boards should base their decisions on the most up-to-date, scientific information which is the guidance issued by the CDC. Universal masking in schools K-12 is essential. We implore you to immediately take action as the safety of our school children, teachers and their families is at risk.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,