



State of Missouri Team,

If you're anything like me, you love scrolling through social media this time of year to see post after post of students' beaming faces, eager to start another school year. I also enjoy seeing colleagues sharing photos of their rooms, ready to welcome a new group of excited learners. This year's first-day photos have looked slightly different, as schools are opening in a variety of ways to best accommodate their students and local communities. Pictures include teachers showing off the mobile cart they're taking from class to class. Classrooms have been redesigned to include clear plastic dividers and other methods to allow for social distancing. And we've all seen students and educators wearing masks that show off their favorite character, color or school mascot.

Those masks were the topic of the most recent update to the [School Reopening Guidance FAQ document](#) developed by the Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). This change was made when the [American Academy of Pediatrics \(AAP\) updated their mask guidance](#) after reviewing the latest data and evidence.

Here's the main section of our School Reopening Guidance FAQ document that was updated on August 17: ***Should K-12 students and staff wear face coverings?*** *Face coverings are an important strategy to reduce transmission of the novel coronavirus, both by reducing the spread of infection from the wearer to those around as well as by preventing acquisition of the infection by the wearer. It is recommended that school leaders require K-12 students to wear face coverings. Recently published guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics has indicated that "cloth face coverings can be safely worn by all children 2 years of age and older, including the vast majority of children with underlying health conditions, with rare exception." The use of face coverings can provide an additional layer of protection against the spread of infection.*

*Face coverings should especially be considered for all age groups during periods when students are not cohorted or cannot physically distance (e.g. in hallways or during entry and dismissal periods). As noted above, it is also appropriate for all students to wear masks or face coverings while riding the bus.*

It is important to note that this update is guidance and not a statewide mandate; we are recommending local school leaders consider this requirement when establishing the policies for their local school districts. We, at DESE, are following this same mask guidance and implementing other preventative measures aimed at stopping the spread of the virus. Stopping the spread of COVID-19 will help our Missouri schools keep their doors open to the learners who count on in-person learning opportunities.

DESE, in conjunction with the Missouri Hospital Association and the Missouri School Boards' Association, released a poster last week, reminding Missouri students to [“Be a Hero and Mask Up!”](#) noting the power that masks can have against COVID-19 in a fun, student-friendly way. We appreciate our partners at MHA printing these posters and making it possible for elementary and middle school students across the state to see this important message every day.

Amid all of the changes, the importance of educating our children remains constant. Thanks in advance to every member of our Missouri workforce for the important role you play in making this year a success for our students.

I came across something on social media that I think perfectly sums up this unique school year. “The three most important school supplies for the new school year: patience, flexibility and grace.” Our educators, school staff members and families alike are doing the best they can amid these challenging times – like each of us. Let’s stand together across the state, ready to pivot and adapt as needed, for as long as needed.

From all of us at DESE, best wishes to you and your family for a school year that is safe, meaningful and fun!

Margie Vandeven  
Missouri Commissioner of Education