

Dear School Community,

My priority has always been to make our community safer during an unprecedented local surge of COVID-19 cases, while still allowing for in-person education for the vast majority of our students.

Over the last few weeks, we have been closely monitoring the matter of McCarthy on behalf of Scott, et al. v. DeSantis, et al. 2021-CA-1382 as it has made its way through the Leon County Circuit Court, and now to the 1st District Court of Appeal.

A Circuit Court judge ruled that the state could not enforce a ban on mask mandates. That ruling, coupled with a high COVID-19 positivity rate in our community, the high demand on our healthcare system, and the number of classroom closures (92) since the beginning of the year, led us to enforce a mask requirement that began on September 1st. Parents could opt their students out of the requirement with a medical exemption.

However, last Friday, the 1st District Court of Appeal instituted a stay, which means the Florida Department of Education can continue to enforce its interpretation of the parental opt out until this matter is ultimately resolved.

Therefore, starting on Tuesday, September 14, The School District of Lee County will require face coverings, while allowing parents to opt-out without a medical exemption. This applies while being indoors on school campuses, indoors at school sponsored activities, and on school busses.

As the stay only applies to students, District employees will still be required to wear masks and follow the medical exemption process as set forth through Human Resources.

I will always be an advocate for parents' rights. I am especially considerate of those parents who want the right to send their child to school and not have to choose between the safety of their household and their child receiving an in-person, quality public education. I also can't help but think of the rights of parents whose children lay isolated in the ICU at Golisano Children's Hospital whose only desire is for their child to be able to survive this terrible ordeal.

Given the legal landscape, I am appealing to your humanity and sense of community. With approximately 500 COVID-19 patients isolated within our local hospital system, and a 101% staffed bed capacity over the weekend, remember that these aren't just numbers. These are people. These are your neighbors, your family, your friends, your co-workers. I choose to believe that the vast majority of our community are reasonable, caring people who want this surge to end as quickly as

possible and would willingly volunteer to wear masks as an additional measure to protect each other from harm.

Our students have demonstrated great resilience during this entire pandemic. They just want to go to school, engage with their classmates and have some semblance of normalcy restored as soon as this tragic experience subsides. The vast majority of parents and staff want the same.

I implore you to prove your commitment to each other by getting vaccinated, wearing a mask, and following other safety protocols to help us get through this surge together. I will never underestimate our community's ability to show love and compassion for each other.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Savage".

Ken Savage, Ed.D.