

February 7, 2022

To members of the Public Health Committee:

I live in Meriden with my husband and daughter, who attends Meriden Public Schools. I teach high school science in Cromwell.

I'm writing to you today to ask you to consider extending the statewide mask mandate for preK-12 schools. According to Connecticut's open data portal as of February 3, although 76.7% of Cromwell children ages 12-17 are fully vaccinated, just 39.8% of Cromwell children ages 5-11 are fully vaccinated. In Cromwell we also have full-day preK where 100% of the students are too young to be vaccinated. The vaccination rates for Meriden are even lower.

I am certainly not an epidemiologist, but I do trust the public health experts. The CDC recommends universal indoor masking in schools and ECE programs for ages 2 years and older and other strategies to prevent spread of COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status. There have been several prominent local public health experts in our state speaking on the importance of continuing to wear masks in schools.

We don't have the mitigation strategies like social distancing we had in place last year; masks are just about all we have left. Schools are built for efficiency, not preventing the spread of disease. In many schools, the air quality is not great. I cannot open the windows in my classroom. I cannot take my students outside for class right now because it's too cold.

No one enjoys wearing masks, but that strategy is what keeps students and teachers in school. When too many students and teachers are absent, instructional time is lost and parents must take time off work to care for their children.

When the legislative session opens next week, you will undoubtedly be bombarded by loud, boisterous individuals who would claim their children are suffering irreparable harm by having to wear a mask. Our children's mental health has suffered, but it is not because of the masks. Children are incredibly resilient, but they need structure and they need adults to model why it's so important to wear masks to show that we care about not getting others sick.

I respectfully ask you to work on extending the mask mandate a little while longer, until vaccination rates increase and cases decrease.

Sincerely,

Leigh Neumon  
Meriden resident  
Cromwell teacher