

Could Students Be Disciplined For Not Wearing Masks, If Schools Return In St. Mary's?

Posted by [Zach Hill](#) On 06/27/2020

LEONARDTOWN, Md. — Some people complain about others not wearing face masks or wearing them incorrectly, while others complain about the need to continue wearing them as the country continues to reopen. The discussion about wearing masks is far from over, especially when it comes to how St. Mary's County Public Schools(SMCPS) plans to address the issue of students wearing them if they return to classrooms in the fall.

Last week, SMCPS hosted a virtual town hall directed towards schools returning after summer, describing all various scenarios that have to be planned for in times of uncertainty. Planning for a return fully to classrooms, an online and in-person hybrid plan, and a fully virtual plan.

The current "Safe Return Plan for Education" being made by the SMCPS recovery committee is being structured around four primary pillars. These pillars include teaching and learning, services for students, supporting services, and organization and system support.

The piece of the plan which goes without saying is the presumptive safety and sanitation conditions that would need to be altered with any return to school plans. However, Superintendent Dr. James Scott Smith, Deputy Superintendent Dr. Maureen Montgomery, and the entire recovery committee appear to be planning for another integral part as well: the need for students to wear masks throughout their days at school, under current Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations.

To the point that when asked about the topic of wearing masks by a live audience member, Montgomery mentioned the possibility of "discipline issues" for students who fail to comply.

"We are all about making sure that we give the reason and the justification and hopefully we don't have to turn things into discipline issues, that's never what we want to do," Montgomery said during the town hall. "We just want people to be safe and considerate of the people around them."

Even though the issue of wearing a mask should be one of public health, [a recent report by Axios-Ipsos has found that nationally people are more or less likely to use masks based on their political affiliation](#). The mask-wearing habits of parents appear to be a large part of what raises concerns for the superintendent.

"The masks, in particular, are going to be a real challenge," Smith said. "When we look around and we see the example being set by adults, and [how] we are going to carry that expectation on children, we are going to have a lot of work with our children and their parents... As far as the importance of wearing a mask, not for yourself but others."

But it is still unknown what kinds of repercussions non-compliant students could face for not wearing masks in the fall. In an email response from Dr. Montgomery, she explained how the committee has only just begun their work, but they "prefer to educate our students and families, as education is far more effective than punitive consequences."

But before there is a real need to worry about educating people on wearing masks to school, schools will have to be open.

"It's easy to have people follow rules if they understand and agree with the reason for the rule," Smith said. "Anybody who doesn't understand the reason behind wearing a face mask at this point, we are going to need a lot of time to help them understand their responsibility."

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