

Dear River Bend Families,

August 13, 2021

On August 6, 2021 the River Bend Community Unit School District #2 shared an update to our return to school plan for the 2021-22 school year based on Governor Pritzker's Executive Order requiring P-12 school staff, students, and visitors to wear masks indoors, regardless of vaccination status. Recently, the ISBE and IDPH sent superintendents a 27-page Revised Public Health Guidelines for schools in carrying out the Executive Order. Both can also be found on our [website](#). [A Safe Return Plan](#) and [Safe Return Plan Summary](#) was also sent to families to provide additional clarification and guidance and can be opened through this letter.

Requests from community members for the River Bend School District to ignore the Executive Order and make masks optional have been heard by the Board of Education and myself, but cannot be acted upon. Time and time again over the last 18 months the Executive Orders have been challenged in court and each time, the courts have upheld their authority. On August 11, 2021 the River Bend Board of Education voted to approve the [Safe Return Plan](#).

This most recent Executive Order effectively eclipses the local authority of school boards to adopt mask-optional plans for the upcoming school year. Governor Pritzker cited both the potential liability exposure for any local school board disregarding the mask mandate and the authority of ISBE to change recognition status of a school district and, by extension, impact school district funding as possible means to enforce the mask mandate.

The Governor also said he would take action to enforce the mandate as needed. For River Bend, that would mean a loss of approximately \$4.0 million dollars in state funding. Losing our recognition status also puts our student athletes' eligibility into question under IHSA rules and overall district insurability. As of today, ISBE has removed school status for nonpublic schools and has placed public schools on probation thus jeopardizing their ISBE recognition status simply because the school district voted to ignore the mask requirement mandate.

While we believe in local control, we also rely on expertise and clear guidance in public health. We also rely on legal guidance and counsel from the Illinois Association of School Boards. Once an executive order is issued, it has the effect of law, and boards should work with local counsel to comply with it. Failure to do so may result in sanctions against the district and expose the district, its employees, and the board to unnecessary liability. Throughout this week, the district office has performed about 12 rapid tests of which 3 have been positive, two students and a staff member. Unfortunately, the Covid virus is returning to our communities.

At the River Bend School Board's meeting a return plan that called for masks to be recommended but not required was discussed as well as shared with the public. At the 11th hour, local control was taken away from us and a statewide mandate was issued. We are not asking for you to change your personal opinions on the matter, but to respect the decision that has been made for us and assist us in implementing it, which will allow your children to come back to school all-day, every-day.

Looking forward to an exciting year,

Darryl Hogue