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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION ISSUES STATEMENT ON STATEWIDE FACE COVERING REQUIREMENT IN SCHOOLS

***State Board and the Maryland State Department of Education Continue to Prioritize In-person Learning;
Remain Committed to Public Health Strategies and Evaluating Current Data, Metrics, & Science***

(February 11, 2022) - With improving Covid-19 metrics throughout Maryland, the Maryland State Board of Education reaffirms its commitment to regularly evaluate the need to require face coverings in schools. By layering available public health measures and guided by data and science, the State Board of Education and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) continue to prioritize safe, full-time, in-person learning with minimal disruption.

“The Maryland State Board of Education is watching with optimism as Covid-19 metrics improve in the State in order to provide safe in person instruction for our children and staff with minimal disruptions,” said State Board President Clarence C. Crawford. “In fact, the State Board issued the current not-to-exceed 180-day face covering emergency regulation with off ramps during the Omicron surge, in anticipation of an improving environment in which face coverings would no longer be needed as we learn to live with the virus.”

At each monthly meeting, the State Board reviews current COVID-19 metrics in the State to assess the need for the continuation of the regulation; the next review will occur at the next State Board meeting on February 22, 2022. As a transition to ultimately lifting the face covering requirement, these research-based off ramps allow local superintendents and school boards to unilaterally lift the requirement as follows:

1. If at least 80 percent of the county population in the county where the schools are located is fully vaccinated, as reported by MDH.
2. The local superintendent may lift the face covering requirement for a school facility or facilities after a principal or designated school official verifies that 80 percent of the school staff and students in the school facility have been fully vaccinated.
3. The local superintendent may lift the face covering requirement in schools if the county has sustained 14 consecutive days of moderate or low transmission rate of COVID-19 cases, as reported by the CDC.

“With the goal of protecting the health of all members of the education community, and ensuring a safe return to in-person learning for every child, the face covering requirement issued through emergency regulations was necessary in the face of high community spread, the lack of a vaccine for children under the age of 12, limited testing opportunities, and the emergence of the Omicron variant, all experienced during the first part of the 21-22 school year. The face covering requirement helped keep all of our schools open through the Fall – as

many schools and entire districts closed around the country - and it helped our school systems weather the Omicron surge and preserve in-person learning for the vast majority of our students,” said State Superintendent of Schools Mohammed Choudhury. “We continue to emerge from the pandemic and transition to an environment that now includes readily available vaccines for school-aged children, ample testing opportunities, and a greater depth of understanding of Covid-19 and its impact. I look forward to closely working with members of the State Board during the upcoming State Board of Education meeting to reassess the emergency regulations and explore whether there is continual need for a statewide face covering requirement. At the same time, we will continue to remain laser focused on our mission to unapologetically lead and boldly confront the impact of the pandemic in our school communities, mitigate learning loss, accelerate student learning, and support the social and emotional needs of our children and staff.”

The State Board and MSDE continue to rely upon science, research, and guidance from public health experts, including the CDC and the Maryland Department of Health, in its efforts to ensure schools remain safely open. The school face-covering requirement regulation is posted on the homepage of www.marylandpublicschools.org and can be found [here](#).

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