



BESE

Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

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BESE News

BESE revises minimum COVID-19 school safety standards to clarify face covering policy

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At a special called meeting today, the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) approved revisions to its COVID-19-related minimum health and safety standards for the reopening of K-12 schools in the 2020-2021 school year. The revisions clarify that BESE's minimum standards, pertaining to face coverings, are superseded by any statewide or district-specific mandate issued by the governor, and that face covering requirements are to be determined by local school systems when no mask mandate from the governor is in place.

The agenda item was specifically requested by BESE President Sandy Holloway, who said, "A few weeks ago when Governor Edwards lifted his statewide mask mandate but excluded schools, I asked Superintendent Brumley to engage in conversations with the Governor about adjusting the requirement for the K-12 community. While I have great respect for the Governor's decision, I also have great respect for a parent's right to choose. My desire has been that we would move closer to putting this decision back in the hands of those closest to students, and no one is closer than a child's parent."

"Throughout the pandemic BESE has worked hard to strike the right balance, and I am eager for our students to be able to enjoy quality, in-person instruction without a mask. In clarifying that the decision on face coverings is a local decision when there is no existing mandate by the Governor, I believe we're striking the right balance again today."

The revisions approved by the Board today are [available for public viewing online here](#). The policy clarifications also confirm the expiration of the BESE minimum health and safety standards with the end of the 2020-2021 school year on June 30, 2021.

The Board further directed the State Superintendent to meet with the Governor to request the lifting of mask requirements for K-12 students in summer school programs, and easing the mask mandate in schools in certain circumstances such as outdoor activities and recess.

The BESE standards were originally developed in response to Act 9 of the 2020 First Extraordinary Session, which required the Board to adopt emergency rules informed by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines to provide minimum standards, policies, medical exceptions, and regulations to govern the reopening of schools for the 2020-2021 school year. The BESE standards were developed by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) in coordination with the Louisiana Department of Health in accordance with CDC guidance. Each Local Education Agency (LEA) adopted policies that aligned with the state's standards prior to the start of the 2020-2021 school year and submitted a plan to the LDE for approval addressing each phase of reopening.

BESE approved the policy revisions as emergency rules in accordance with R.S. 49:953. The revisions are effective immediately, and apply to all traditional public, charter, and nonpublic schools in Louisiana. The emergency declaration remains in effect for 120 days or until the permanent rules are promulgated in accordance with state law through the regular Notice of Intent process.

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BESE is the administrative policymaking body for elementary and secondary schools in Louisiana. The Board sets key education initiatives and works to outline an education agenda to achieve continuous improvement of public education as measured by student and school achievement

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