

Suffolk County Community College

College Brief

NO. 78 March 1, 2022

TO: The College Community

FROM: Dr. Edward Bonahue
 President

SUBJECT: College Shifting to Mask-Optional Policy Wednesday, March 2

As you know, on Sunday Governor Hochul announced that the state will end its masking requirement for public schools (K-12) effective Wednesday, March 2. In summarizing the rationale behind her decision, Governor Hochul cited the state's decline in positivity rates, cases of serious illness and hospitalizations, as well as the increased percentage of fully vaccinated New Yorkers. Ahead of the governor's announcement, the college also received updated guidance from SUNY, indicating that whenever the mask mandate was lifted by the state, colleges would be free to lift their indoor masking requirement, in consultation with their local health department. In addition, the CDC's guidance on masking has changed significantly.

The college's Safe Start Task Force met yesterday afternoon, reviewed the current guidance, and recommended the following changes, which I am adopting, effective tomorrow, March 2:

- Masking will continue to be an option for all members of our community but will no longer be required.
- The college will continue to provide masks, hand sanitizer, and the same level of cleaning services.
- The college will continue to provide on-campus COVID testing, and regular surveillance testing will continue.
- Students attending clinical or internship sites with more stringent masking rules must continue to comply with the site's policies.

It is anticipated that many employees and students alike will desire to continue using masks in indoor settings, and I trust that all members of the Suffolk community will recognize that our colleagues and students have many different reasons to continue or discontinue masking, and that individual needs and differences will be respected and mutually supported.

In addition, the Task Force requested that the community be reminded that the following COVID-related policies and procedures continue to remain in effect:

- 1) **Student vaccination requirement:** In alignment with the SUNY Student Vaccine Policy, all current students coming to campus for classes, activities or services must be vaccinated for COVID-19.

- 2) **Student booster requirement:** As soon as they are eligible, students are required to present evidence of a COVID-19 vaccine booster during the spring 2022 semester.
- 3) **Surveillance testing:** All college employees and on-campus students are required to participate in surveillance testing twice per month, regardless of vaccination status, in accordance with the plan developed by the Safe Start Task Force.
- 4) **Continue to monitor your health:** Everyone is encouraged to continue following good hygiene practices, to monitor their health daily, and to stay home if they feel ill. Faculty, staff, and students who are unvaccinated, may have or care for family members with a heightened risk for illness, are encouraged to continue to wear a mask. Again, the community is reminded to be respectful toward anyone who chooses to continue to wear a mask.

A similar communication will be issued to our students.

The College will continue to monitor the public health and will change its directives in response to a COVID-19 resurgence, new information, guidance and/or direction from federal, state, or local authorities or agencies.

I am grateful to the members of the Safe Start Task Force, chaired by Dr. Irene Rios, as they have led efforts to ensure the continued health and safety of our community across all of our campuses. I am certain that I join all of you in hoping that we are finally turning the corner and leaving this period of uncertainty behind us.