

Westfield schools to vote on lifting mask mandate Feb. 17

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WESTFIELD — Superintendent Stefan Czaporowski said the Westfield School Committee will vote during a virtual meeting at 5:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 17, on whether to go along with the lifting of the statewide mask mandate in city schools on Feb. 28.

Czaporowski said he has spoken with Westfield Public Health Director Joseph Rouse, who he said supports letting the schools adopt a mask advisory, instead of requiring face coverings. The Westfield Board of Health last week [voted to replace its city-wide mask mandate with an advisory](#). Without action by the School Committee, however, school rules requiring face coverings while indoors for all students and adults, regardless of vaccination status, would remain in place.

“It will be up to the School Committee to rescind the mask policy that is in place,” Czaporowski said.

Czaporowski said since the state announced it would end the statewide mandate and let each district set its own policy, he has had several communications from parents asking to keep Westfield’s mask policy in place. On the other hand, “plenty of parents are saying we shouldn’t keep it,” he added.

He did say that the numbers of positive cases have gone way down, dropping from hundreds of cases a week in most of January to just 14 in the weeks of Jan. 31 and Feb. 7.

“The numbers are definitely headed in the right direction,” he said.

The potential change in mask policy comes in the same week that Westfield is shifting its COVID-19 testing regimen. Starting today, Feb. 14, the district will implement a state-funded at-home testing program, to replace the in-school Test-and-Stay system. Letters went home to families, and free iHealth at-home rapid antigen test kits were handed out Feb. 10 and 11 to staff and students. Each kit contains two tests, and the recommendation is to test students every Sunday night, and report positive results either online at www.schoolsofwestfield.org by clicking on the COVID link, or by calling the child’s school on Monday morning. Individual results will remain confidential.

Test kits will be handed out every two weeks. Czaporowski said he is a little concerned about the test kit making it home with students and being properly administered. If parents are concerned, they may call the schools and make arrangements to pick the tests up.

As part of this new program, the district is discontinuing Test-and-Stay and contact tracing for in-school close contacts. Czaporowski said he is relieved to make the change, as the former system took up a large amount of staff time.

The new at-home testing opportunity is voluntary and only those who opt in will receive tests.

COVID-19 symptoms include a fever of 100 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, and chills or shaking chills; difficulty breathing or shortness of breath; new loss of taste or smell; muscle aches or body aches; cough, sore throat, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea; headache, fatigue, nasal congestion or runny nose when in combination with other symptoms.