

DESE Policy on Vaccination Rate Threshold

September 27, 2021

At the special meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) on August 24, 2021, the Board voted to declare “exigent circumstances” pursuant to the Student Learning Time (SLT) regulations, [603 CMR 27.08 \(1\)](#), and authorized the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education to require masks for public school students (age 5 and above) and staff in all grades through at least October 1, 2021.

As of October 15, 2021, if a school demonstrates a vaccination rate of 80 percent or more of all students and staff in the school through an attestation form submitted to DESE, then vaccinated individuals in that school would no longer be subject to the mask requirement.¹ Whether or not a school or district avails themselves of the 80 percent vaccination off ramp is a local decision to be made by school and district leaders in consultation with local health officials. In alignment with [statewide guidance](#), unvaccinated students and staff would be required to continue wearing masks. The Department will continue to work with medical advisers to explore other metrics to inform further off ramps for masks.

Schools that seek approval to lift the mask requirement must submit an [attestation form](#) to DESE for approval. DESE will respond to districts and schools within 2 business days of their submission. For questions regarding this information, please contact DESE’s Rapid Response Help Center at anne.marie.stronach@mass.gov.

On September 27, 2021, after consulting with medical experts and state health officials, the Commissioner extended the mask mandate through at least November 1, 2021.

Vaccination Rate Threshold

Calculating the 80 percent threshold rate:

- The 80 percent threshold rate is to be calculated on a school-by-school basis. The threshold must be calculated including all enrolled students in the building plus any staff member regularly providing in-school services.
 - “Any staff member regularly providing in-school services” includes contracted staff (e.g., itinerant staff), individuals engaged to provide goods or services (e.g., student teachers/tutors, food service workers), part-time employees, non-student facing school-based staff (e.g., clerks), coaches, after-school staff, etc.
 - District central office staff and other individuals who are in the school infrequently/briefly (e.g., parents, individuals making deliveries) should not be included in the 80 percent threshold calculation. Central office employees should be included in the calculation for a school if their offices are located within a school building.

Collecting proof of vaccination:

- Schools should determine a method to collect proof of COVID-19 vaccination for all eligible staff and students. An individual will be required to demonstrate proof that they have received either the required two doses of the Pfizer or Moderna or the single dose of the Johnson & Johnson’s

¹ In the event that a school has already collected proof of vaccination and meet the 80 percent threshold, it may submit its attestation form before October 15 for consideration by the Department.

Janssen. An individual who received a vaccination outside of the country must have received a vaccine as approved by the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO).

- All documentation related to an individual's vaccination should be maintained confidentially, and, in the case of a school's employee, should be held separate from their personnel file.
- Individual proof of vaccination could include:
 - A signed self-attestation completed by the vaccinated individual or parent/guardian on behalf of the vaccinated student; or
 - Documentation provided to the individual by the [Massachusetts Department of Public Health](#) or a health care provider. Documentation may include but is not limited to a COVID-19 vaccination record card or a copy or digital picture of the vaccination record card, or a print-out from the [Massachusetts Immunization Information System](#) (MIIS).
- Approved designated staff may verify individual vaccination records or self-attestation forms using MIIS.

Attestation to DESE

- Each school that seeks approval to lift the state mask requirement must submit an [attestation form](#) to Rob Curtin (robert.c.curtin@mass.gov) verifying at least 80 percent of the school's staff and students are fully vaccinated.
- The appropriate signatory on the attestation to DESE must be an individual with the authority to attest to the information submitted for each school, such as the superintendent or executive director.