

# Appendix A

[https://www.news-gazette.com/coronavirus/its-time-to-move-forward-with-the-school-year-and-focus-on-what-public-schools/article\\_7e2a2839-fc3a-53d4-aba0-ce2ff6f939b8.html](https://www.news-gazette.com/coronavirus/its-time-to-move-forward-with-the-school-year-and-focus-on-what-public-schools/article_7e2a2839-fc3a-53d4-aba0-ce2ff6f939b8.html)

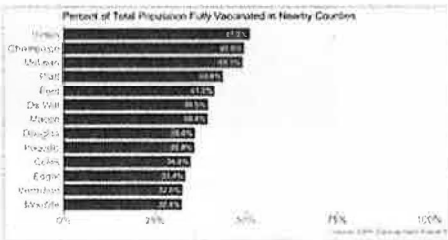
## 'It's time to move forward with the school year and focus on what public schools do best — educate students'

Aug 10, 2021

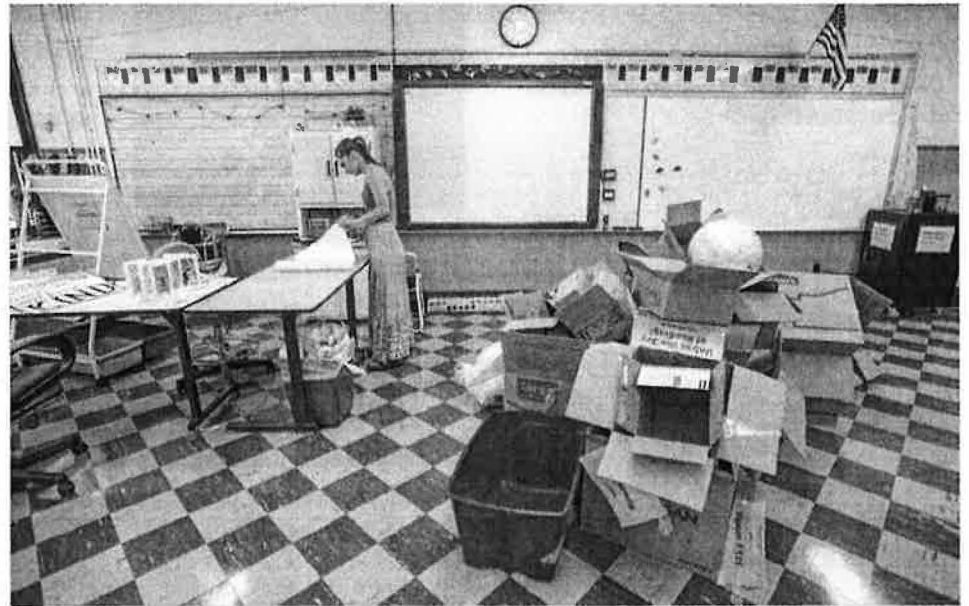


**Masks back for indoor athletics: 'It definitely does feel like a big step back'**

*When school starts a week from Wednesday, the Mahomet-Seymour and Monticello districts plan to comply fully with Gov. J.B. Pritzker's masks-for-all mandate. While they'd much prefer local control over COVID-19 decisions, the two districts' superintendents — LINDSEY HALL and VIC ZIMMERMAN — explain in a guest column written for The News-Gazette why not following the rules would be 'reckless and irresponsible.'*



**'This is a mandate': Pritzker announces students, staff, faculty in schools must mask up indoors**



Third-grade teacher Megan Garrett prepares her new classroom at Washington School in Monticello.

Robin Scholz/The News-Gazette



**Beyond the Boardroom: Countryside Head of School Krystal Young**

**'The continued debate is a distraction from the critically important goal of getting our kids back in school'**

By LINDSEY HALL and VIC ZIMMERMAN



**Just 1 Question: What's your level of confidence that the worst of the pandemic is behind us?**

**Coronavirus response | State offering UI saliva tests to all public K-12 schools**



**UPDATE: Pritzker's K-12 mask mandate extends to indoor sports**



**Coronavirus response | Marching band programs move ahead with fewer restrictions**

It became apparent to many superintendents some time in the 2020-21 school year that getting kids back in school full time, without interruption, was the top priority for the 2021-22 school year.

This includes both of us, whose districts followed slightly different plans and schedules last year, yet we also saw our students (and staff) miss many days of school, and thus instruction, and extracurricular activities.

As we get ready to start school in a few short days, this we know to be true: We don't like masks, we don't like COVID-19, we don't like mandates, we believe in local control and we believe in personal freedoms.



Lindsey Hall is the superintendent of the Mahomet-Seymour school district.

We are school superintendents and not medical professionals. We recommended to our school boards that our districts implement the CDC/IDPH guidance (that has changed multiple times in the last few weeks) to return to school for the 2021-22 school year.

At the time of our board meetings earlier in July, the guidance said for schools to use a number of layered mitigations

(promoting vaccines, masking, physical distancing, cleaning, testing/screening) based on local COVID-19 data and indicated that masks were recommended (but not required) for unvaccinated individuals, or as of July 27, all individuals in schools.



Vic Zimmerman is the superintendent of the Monticello school district.

We suggested that our return-to-school plans be reviewed again prior to the start of school so that we could consider local COVID-19 data and the implementation of mitigations as close to the first day of school as possible.

We were both planning to change our recommendations to our boards for starting school to *require* masking for everyone prior to Gov. J.B. Pritzker mandating that we do so on Aug. 4.

We are school and education experts, and our goal is to have our schools open all day for five days per week as safely as possible. The best plan to make that happen is to have required masking for everyone in our schools, regardless of vaccine status or personal opinion on the matter.

We were basing our recommendations for required masking on contact tracing and quarantine requirements when we do have students or employees who end up COVID-19-positive.

When masking is required and correctly implemented for all, the number of individuals who would have to quarantine (stay home from school) when determined to be close contacts is virtually zero when compared to the number who would be required to quarantine with a masking-optional or mixed-masking policy.

Our recommendations would be to look at local COVID-19 data points monthly to determine if and when we could consider lifting layers of mitigations, including required masking in our schools. We understand that a recommendation of required masking in our school districts would have been very unpopular with many of our community members and that our school boards may not have approved our recommendations, but we are confident that it was the best plan to keep our schools open for our students, teachers, parents and communities with the least amount of disruption based on the current situation in which we were faced.

Pritzker has now taken local control away with a statewide mandate, and we are hearing from parents and community members that we should violate the executive order (which is akin to a state law).

As leaders of our school districts, we cannot recommend that our school boards approve violating a state law. This would be reckless and irresponsible.

School districts risk lawsuits, loss of insurance, funding elimination and loss of state recognition (no longer able to award diplomas or participate in IHSA activities) for violating the law.

Members of school boards are elected to demonstrate fiduciary responsibility to their taxpayers and to be responsible shepherds of taxpayer money. The increased exposure to unwarranted risk and liabilities by not following this mandate has legitimate ramifications — these are not empty threats or imagined scenarios.

We teach our students to work through challenges in multiple ways and to stand up for themselves when they disagree — we don't teach them that they can pick and choose which laws they want to follow and which rules to ignore because they don't like them.

We don't like government mandates, either — trust us: There are plenty sent our way every year — and we believe that our school boards and local communities trust us enough to make the right calls for our local districts when it comes to school (not medical or political) decisions.

Ignoring the requirement for universal masking puts our teachers and building administrators in extremely difficult positions. The continued debate is a distraction from the critically important goal of getting our kids back in school. The "fight," if you will, is no longer at the local level, since local control has been taken away.

We are looking forward to seeing our students and teachers back in our buildings for full school days, sporting and music events, drama productions, regular recess and lunch times and social opportunities.

They showed us last year that masking was not a big deal — if that's what it takes right now, then so be it. It's time to move forward with the 2021-22 school year and to focus on what public schools do best — educate students.

## Trending Videos

---