



FALLING BEHIND

As omicron wave wanes, students forced to quarantine are having trouble keeping up

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COVID-19 UPDATE

Masks can go off soon

Most plan to keep theirs on, however

JIYOUN CHOI
News Editor

NOLAN ZILS
Co-Editor-in-Chief

Starting March 12, masks will be optional for students and staff, with some caveats. Superintendent Dr. Robert Bravo announced the lifting of the mandate during the March 3 board meeting, citing dropping COVID cases, the accessibility of testing, and high vaccination rates.

Although masks are still strongly recommended, there are certain conditions that need to be met to go mask-free, such as whether the space is a dedicated health facility and whether the student is displaying symptoms.

Bravo also warned that personal decisions regarding mask-wearing must be respected in the classroom, and he encouraged teachers to discuss this with students.

“Staff are to take any actions necessary to maintain an environment of kindness and respect so that no one is made to feel harassed for their decision whether to wear or not to wear a mask,” Bravo said in a statement released March 4.

The decision follows an announcement from Gov. Gavin Newsom that allowed school districts to decide their own masking policies. Some districts, such as the San Jose Unified and Palo Unified, have already announced their decision to go mask-optional.

In anticipation of the announcement, a Bear Witness survey of 467 readers earlier this week found that even if masks were no longer required at school, more than 70% would keep wearing their masks.

Some students, like senior Lipitha Tummala, are torn between the two options. Tummala likes the idea of seeing her peers’ faces, but also is worried about the potential health risk of not wearing masks.

“We don’t know the pros and cons since we haven’t actually taken masks off,” she said. “Will it cause a spike in cases? We don’t know, and I’m not sure it would be a good idea to find out.”

Branham Assistant Principal Nikita Shah believes that the school is prepared for a post-mandate environment, as COVID-19 cases are steady even after students came back from vacation this week.

She also understands the reasoning behind why some students want the mandate to continue, including medical conditions, at-risk family members, or personal safety.

“I do see the challenges for students who will need that in place,” she said.

Other than COVID-19, Shah reminds the students that if they have the flu or are sick, the students should stay home like pre-pandemic times.

“Nobody wants a cold anymore,” she said. “If you’re feeling symptoms, stay home.”

Editorial

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