



September 18, 2020

Dear HVWS Early Childhood Parents,

Last Spring, when school campuses across Connecticut were forced to close, childcare centers were allowed to remain open, operating under guidelines from the Office of Early Childhood. In order to allow more programs serving young children to remain open in person in the event of a spike in COVID-19 in Connecticut, the state made the decision to allow independent schools with early childhood programs to operate under OEC guidelines as well.

The OEC's initial operational guidelines included mandatory mask-wearing for adults, but not for children. You may be aware that the Connecticut guidelines for K-12 students require masks for all, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends masks for anyone two years of age and older. The OEC spent time reviewing their guidelines with the CT Department of Public Health and this week the OEC updated their guidelines to include required mask-wearing for students three years of age and older. This update applies to our Early Childhood program. This change is effective September 21, 2020 and will remain in effect during the pandemic unless modified by the Commissioner of Early Childhood.

While many parents will greet this news with a sigh of relief, many will receive it with anxiety. In their updated guidance, the OEC recognizes that there will need to be a transition period to implement such a change. Mask-wearing is one of many hygiene and social skills children can learn. Teachers and parents can work to help their students and children learn how to wear masks through a phase-in period extending to October 19, 2020.

- Children who are working toward mask wearing are permitted to remove their mask or face covering during this transition period.
- Children who have just turned three years old may have up to two months to acclimate to wearing a mask and support developmental readiness.
- Children are not required to wear a mask while eating, sleeping, or resting. During these times, distance between children will continue to be maximized.
- As with our grade school students, mask breaks will be arranged throughout the day.
- Masks may be removed for outdoor activities, and we will continue to spend a great deal of time outside.

We are working to update our school operational plans to reflect this change, and our teachers are working together to come up with thoughtful and creative ways to help students adjust to this change in the classroom. Please know that the mask wearing for our grade school students has gone very smoothly, even for our youngest students. As we have said before, we are living through unprecedented times, but we are so fortunate to be navigating these changes to our daily routines within this supporting and caring community.

With warm regards,

The HVWS COVID-19 Task Force