



## District Statement on Masks in Schools, Senate Bill 5044 And Comprehensive Sex Education

The following statement is in response to questions and concerns brought forward by several patrons and parents over the past couple of weeks:

- **Masks in Schools:** Several people brought forward concerns about the requirement of students wearing masks in schools. As a public school district in Washington, the District is obligated to follow orders and guidance issued by Governor Jay Inslee, the Legislature, the Washington State Department of Health, Department of Labor and Industries, and the Yakima Health District when it comes to matters of public health. To quote our local health jurisdiction from a June 2, 2021, correspondence:
  - *“This is a decision that is not local and does not allow the school to decide. It is a requirement to wear a mask in school. They (school districts) are not considered a business and do not have the option like businesses.”*

There are ramifications for not adhering to these orders and guidance. Two examples include exclusion from insurance coverage for failure to comply and impacts to the District’s labor force. Collectively bargained agreements with each individual labor group within the District requires the District to comply with orders and guidance. Not complying would risk potential grievances from local unions.

While the District wholeheartedly wants what is best for students, its role is not to debate the science behind wearing masks as a mitigating measure against COVID 19. The District’s role is to act in the best interest of every child while adhering to rules that govern school districts in Washington State. There are instances where local school districts have local control over issues. Again, because Selah is a public school district, going against mandated laws, orders or guidance is not an area where the District has discretion. Also, the District is aware of no other public school district in Washington that is going against masking requirements.

Finally on this issue, Superintendent Shane Backlund works almost daily with health leaders, state organization representatives and legal counsel to interpret these mandates. There is an advocacy effort and he is conveying your voice to these bodies regularly.

- **Senate Bill 5044** - Senate Bill 5044 was signed into law this spring by Governor Inslee. The law requires school staff, educators and board members to receive training on cultural competency, diversity, equity or inclusion (CCDEI). The term “critical race theory” does not appear anywhere in the law and it does not mandate any specific criteria for students. Critical race theory has existed for decades in higher education and is a theoretical framework that academics use to recognize racism in our nation’s past and examine how it influences and exists in our institutions today. Critical race theory is NOT

taught in Washington schools. Training for school staff, educators and board members is determined by the District and must be in one or more of the following areas:

- **Cultural Competency** is the ability to understand, appreciate and interact with people from cultures or belief systems different from one's own. Cultural competency refers to knowledge of student cultural histories and contexts as well as family norms and values in different cultures; knowledge and skills in accessing community resources and community and parent outreach; skills in adapting instruction to students' experiences and identifying cultural contexts for individual students.
- **Equity** is fairness in access to opportunities. Equity includes developing, strengthening and supporting procedural and outcome fairness in systems, procedures, and resource distribution mechanisms to create equitable opportunities for all individuals. The term also kindles eliminating barriers that prevent the full participation of individuals and groups.
  - Equity is not only about race but also gender, economic factors/poverty, and abilities.
- **Diversity** is defined as including or involving people from a range of different social and ethnic backgrounds and of different genders, sexual orientations, etc. Diversity describes the presence of similarities and differences within a given setting, collective or group based on multiple factors including race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability status, age, educational status, religion, geography, primary language, culture and other characteristics and experiences.
- **Inclusion** describes intentional efforts and consistent sets of actions to create and sustain a sense of respect, belonging, safety and attention to individual needs and backgrounds that ensure the full access to engagement and participation available.
- **Comprehensive Sex Education:** Sexual health education, including AIDS/HIV prevention education, has been an educational component of the Selah School District for decades. Beginning in fifth grade, students begin to receive instruction about the life-threatening dangers of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) and preventative education. Starting in middle school, students began to receive instruction on sexual health as a component of their PE/Health courses. The District adopted FLASH as the secondary sexual health education curriculum and KNOW as the AIDS/HIV education curriculum.

During the 2020 Legislative Session, changes to the requirements of a comprehensive sexual health education program were placed into law requiring the following components to be implemented by the 2022-2023 school year.

- **Kindergarten-Third Grade:** Social-Emotional learning will be provided in grades kindergarten through third, with a focus on building awareness and skills in managing emotions, setting goals, establishing relationships and making responsible decisions. **There is no sexuality content or curriculum requirements for grades K-3.**

- **Grades Four-Twelve:** Currently required AIDS/HIV prevention education must continue to begin no later than fifth grade and continue throughout high school. Sexual health instruction will begin in fourth or fifth grade, depending on district decisions, and must be consistent with [Washington's Health & Physical Education K-12 Learning Standards](#) with specific grade level outcomes determined by each district. Required instruction for grades fourth and fifth focuses on helping students understand and respect boundaries, developing healthy relationships and gaining a basic understanding of human growth and development.
  - Including instruction on affirmative consent and bystander training. Both must be age appropriate and included within the curriculum. These are defined as:
    - Affirmative consent: an approach of giving and receiving consent for any activity that includes clear, voluntary, enthusiastic permission. It is not the absence of "no."
    - Bystander training: teaches students how to safely intervene when they see bullying, sexual harassment, or unwanted sexual activity.

As required prior to the new requirements of 2020, parents/guardians will be notified of planned instruction and what curriculum will be used. Parents/Guardians will still be allowed to review the District's curriculum and be able to opt their children out of sexual health instruction, if they choose.

The Selah School District plans to bring together a team to determine what will be taught at each grade level during the 2021-2022 school year. Further information about this will be provided.

- **School Board Meetings:** For reference, the School Board in Selah meets twice per month on the second and fourth Thursdays. The first meeting of the month is at 7:00 AM and is a study session focused on a narrow range of predetermined topics for deeper study/discussion where no action is taken. The second meeting is at 4:30 PM and is known as the business meeting. This meeting has a broad range of action items, including budget, enrollment, staffing and board policy among other items.

In closing, the District appreciates the voice of the Selah community and knows there are multiple perspectives on the issues listed above. The District tries to balance the voice of the local community with the requirements of a public school district. Please check the District's website regularly for upcoming school board meeting agendas and minutes from prior meetings.