

How to Get Around Outrageous Back-to-School Mask Mandates

School districts across the country are beginning to impose mask mandates for all students and staff this fall. Officials in Boston, Atlanta, Chicago, and Washington, DC declared last week that everyone in school buildings will be required to wear masks, regardless of vaccination status.

These school districts are going beyond current CDC guidelines, which recommend masking for unvaccinated students and staff only. Instead, they seem to be embracing the masking stance of the American Academy of Pediatrics which announced last week that all students over age two, as well as staff, should wear masks at school even if they are vaccinated.

Back-to-school mask mandates have emerged even as evidence continues to mount showing that children are, thankfully, not at severe risk from the coronavirus. New research out of England reveals that children are even less at risk than previously thought, and domestic data show similar findings. Dr. Marty Makary and his research team at Johns Hopkins University analyzed data from thousands of children diagnosed with COVID-19 in 2020. "Our report found a mortality rate of zero among children without a pre-existing medical condition such as leukemia," he wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* last week.

Several states, including Arkansas, Arizona, Georgia, Iowa, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, and Vermont, have banned masking in schools. Other states, such as Massachusetts, Georgia, and Virginia are leaving it up to individual school districts to decide whether or not to issue mask mandates.

Many parents don't want their children to be masked all day at school, particularly when children are at such a low risk from the virus. Some of these parents are now considering other options.

Virginia mom Gillian Haynes doesn't want her seventh-grader to have to wear a mask all day when schools reopen soon. "I'm absolutely against mask mandates in school and seriously contemplating homeschooling my child to prevent her from being masked," Haynes told her local CBS affiliate, WTVR.

Homeschooling numbers skyrocketed during the previous academic year, tripling from pre-pandemic rates to over 11 percent of the US K-12 school-age population, according to US Census Bureau data. As schools prepare to reopen this year for full-time, in-person learning, it seemed reasonable to think that last year's elevated homeschooling rate would likely decline. But new school mask mandates, along with frequent virus testing, ongoing

social distancing, and quarantine protocols, are prompting parents to continue—or start—homeschooling this fall.

“Now that everyone has had the chance to try some form of homeschooling, I think it is likely that the rate of homeschooling will stay high and possibly even grow,” Michael Donnelly of the Home School Legal Defense Association told me recently. “In addition to the controversies impacting public schools, parents have now tasted the freedom, flexibility, safety, and results of homeschooling and they are way too good to go back. I see a very positive transformation in the way people from every walk of life are turning to homeschooling.”

The *Associated Press* confirmed that the pandemic-related homeschooling surge shows no signs of slowing.

“Although the pandemic disrupted family life across the U.S. since taking hold in spring 2020, some parents are grateful for one consequence: They’re now opting to homeschool their children, even as schools plan to resume in-person classes,” the *AP* reported on Monday.

While some parents may choose to homeschool because of mask mandates, other parents may choose to homeschool because their schools are *not* imposing mask mandates. In North Carolina, one mom said she is taking a leave from her teaching job this fall to homeschool her child until he is eligible for vaccination because the public schools are not mandating masks.

“People are saying I’m going to have to quit my job, I’m going to have to take leave to home school if the masks aren’t in place until vaccinations are available for the underage crowd,” Elena Brown told her local CBS affiliate, WBTV. “Just another couple months of masks. I think that’s really reasonable to allow all of our kids back into the building,” she said.

While parents like Elena may decide to leave work to homeschool their children, it isn’t a prerequisite. Many homeschooling parents work full-time, and single parents are also choosing to homeschool. Homeschool classes and activities, tutors and mentors, learning pods and co-ops, lesson plans, and online learning programs, have become increasingly more abundant and accessible, offering much more flexibility for families who choose the homeschool option.

School masking policies, whatever they are, will likely anger and upset some parents. The solution to dealing with contentious back-to-school masking policies is the same as for all other education issues: parental choice and freedom.

Fortunately, parents do have options beyond their mandatory district school assignment. I

write at length about some of these possibilities in my new, free ebook, ***The 2021 Curious Parent's Guide to Education Options***. Download it [here](#) and please share it with your friends and relatives. Families have more back-to-school choices this year than ever before.