

DISTRICT 202 COMMUNITY COLUMN

By Dr. Lane Abrell
Superintendent of Schools
August 2021

Dear District 202 Community,

I take my role as Plainfield District 202 superintendent very seriously. When needed, part of that role is to communicate information that some don't like or disagree with. This is one of those times.

Very few school superintendents like most of the educational or school-related mandates issued every year. But it is part of our job.

Mandates (or requirements) from the State of Illinois or the Federal Government are usually unfunded and rarely funded. Some are minor, and some much more impactful. They can affect everything including curriculum, finances, health and safety, policy and practice, or other related areas.

On August 4, 2021, Governor J.B. Pritzker issued a mandate in a new way (at least, in Illinois): through Executive Orders.

Although some believe otherwise, Executive Orders are legally binding. (Feel free to consult a constitutional lawyer, your own local attorney, or a judge). Presidents and Governors have issued them for years.

The governor's Executive Order mandates, or requires, that masks be worn in schools building by all regardless of age or vaccination status.

This Executive Order supersedes our plan to open schools as approved by our Board of Education on July 19, 2021.

Our original plan made it optional for students or staff to wear masks. The Covid-related metrics leading up to the adoption of that plan were different than they were when the Governor's Executive Order was issued.

The Executive Order removed our ability to decide locally to implement an opening plan that made masks optional.

Some were relieved with the direction of the new requirement of masks. Others encouraged me or our Board of Education to defy the Executive Order. A few have gone so far as to suggest suing the governor.

We will not do that.

The potential negative impacts of defying the Executive Order may include but are not limited to: a high risk of legal liability, jeopardization of state and federal funding, and participation eligibility of high school athletic or extra-curricular programs.

In addition to a loss of opportunities for students, we simply cannot risk 40 percent of our budgeted revenues to defy the Governor, State Board of Education, or Illinois Department of Public Health.

Our teachers' top job is to educate children. The priority job of our building principals is to serve as the instructional leader of the school and make sure required safety procedures are in place and enforced.

I hope you will allow our teachers and principals to do their jobs without interference or defiance. It is not our job as educators to provide a political stance on the topic of masking in school.

I know it is difficult for some to accept the governor's directives, mandates, or Executive Order(s). That is your right.

However, if you disagree for whatever reason with the current Executive Order (and its conditions for attendance for in-person education) please do not allow your personal views on this issue to negatively impact the school experience for your child(ren) or all our children and the dedicated staff who serve them.

We look forward to the first day of student attendance on August 18, 2021. I appreciate your understanding and cooperation during this challenging time for the benefit of all students, staff, and community members as we continue to prepare learners for the future.

Dr. Lane Abrell
Superintendent
Plainfield Community Consolidated School District 202