

# Masks in Schools Decision-Making Process

February 28, 2022



# How will we navigate this decision?

## A measured approach

1. Survey parents, staff, and community members to gather beliefs about masks in schools and possible barriers
2. Form a health panel to provide guidance to the board and superintendent. The panel will be chaired by Assistant Superintendent Calalang and tasked with identifying the intended and unintended consequences of this decision.
3. Continue to monitor vaccination rates and COVID-19 case counts.

# How will we navigate this decision?

## A measured approach

4. Collaborate with EEA and BACE to gather input from classified and licensed staff.
5. Continue to advocate for families to take advantage of vaccines for k-12 students.
6. Seek legal counsel about how to mitigate legal liability if the district decides to implement optional masking.

# How will we navigate this decision?

## Original Timeline for Input

### February 28<sup>th</sup>

- Survey data
- Health panel recommendations
- Current COVID-19 case rates
- Feedback from the EEA/BACE members
- Opinion about limited liability

### March 14<sup>th</sup> at School Board meeting

- Superintendent Sproles will present a proposal and a plan for how to implement on March 31<sup>st</sup>.

# How will we navigate this decision?

## Updated Timeline with new dates

### February 28<sup>th</sup>

- Survey data
- Health panel recommendations with COVID-19 case rates
- School board discussion and consideration of public comment

### March 1st

- District health team and Superintendent Sproles will make decision about masks and communicated to staff, students and families

### March 12th

- Indoor masking requirement lifted in Oregon
- Local decision making for masks in schools

# Masks in Bethel Schools: Survey Results

February 28, 2022



OHA and ODE announced that the state's public indoor mask mandate would be dropped in March, leaving it up to individual districts to implement mask-related policies moving forward.

Following the announcement, the Bethel District shared a detailed plan for how it would approach the decision-making process regarding mask policies in schools.

Part of that plan included surveying Bethel students, staff and families.

# **Our measured approach included a survey of Bethel students, staff and families**

Included: Bethel high school students, staff and families

Targeted outreach to specific student and family groups

Families were able to respond for a week

Sent out to families via email and text message



## **Our main question:**

When and where do you think masks should be required to be worn in Bethel Schools?

- Masks should be optional
- Masks should be required at all times
- Masks should be worn in targeted settings such as those where students with significant medical needs or conditions are present

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# Student responses



# Student Survey Results

## Specific groups

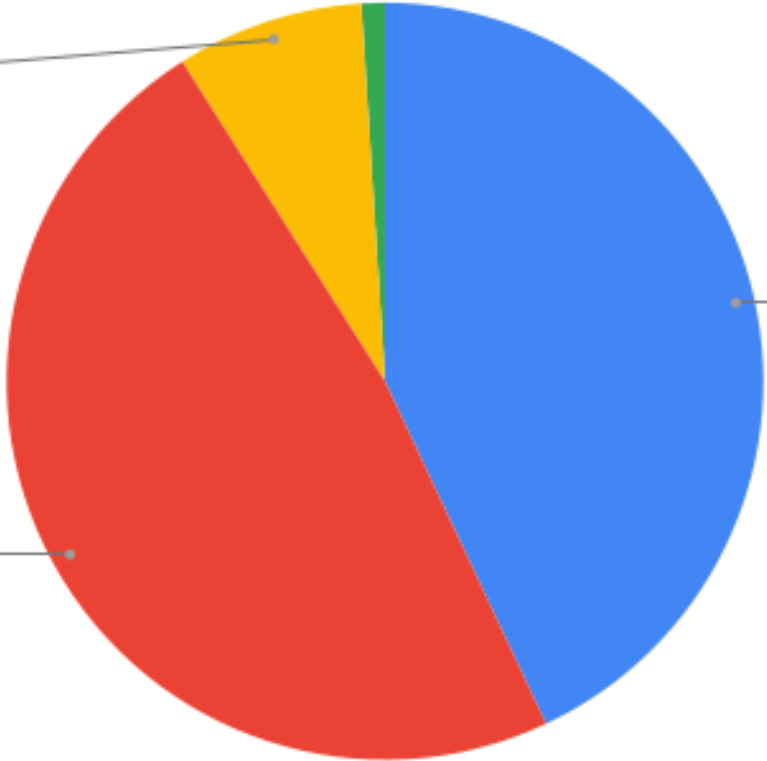
- Black Student Union
- Native American Student Union
- Gay Straight Alliance
- HS English Language Development (ELD) groups
- Leadership
- Sources of Strength

WHS Special Groups

**Targeted**  
8.0%

**Optional**  
48.0%

**Required**  
43.0%



81 total responses

# Student Survey Results

## WHS General Student Population

- Every 2nd period class given the opportunity to respond
- Principal Advisory Group discussion

455 Responses

WHS General Population

**Targeted**

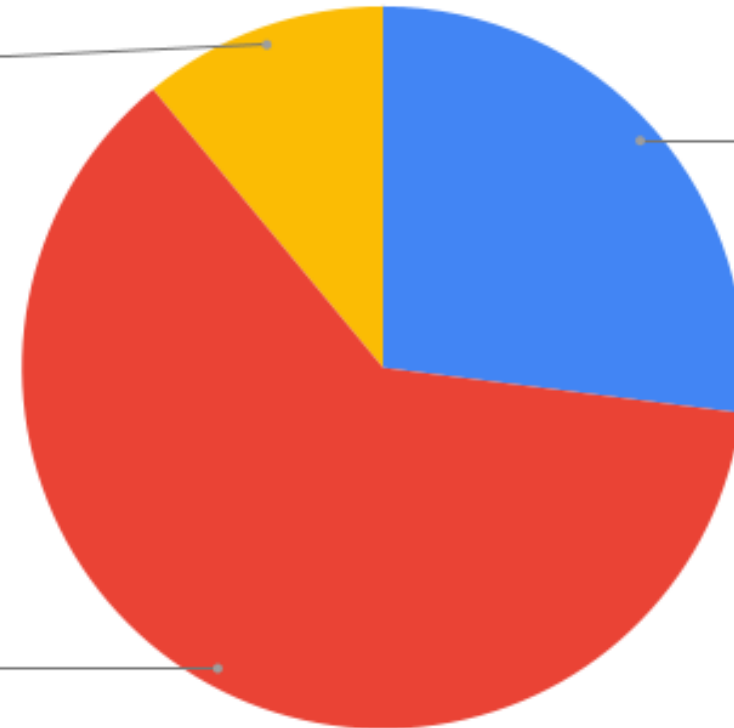
11.0%

**Required**

27.0%

**Optional**

62.0%



# Top worries expressed by students

## Argument for optional masking:

- Masks make it hard to breathe
- Ability to better connect with others
- Freedom of choice is important
- If COVID rates are down, it makes sense to relieve mask requirements

## Argument for required masking:

- Increased spread and rise of COVID rates
- Would rather wear mask than quarantine
- Concerns about high-risk family and friends/ might prompt transition to online school
- Protecting ourselves and others
- Helps stop the spread of disease

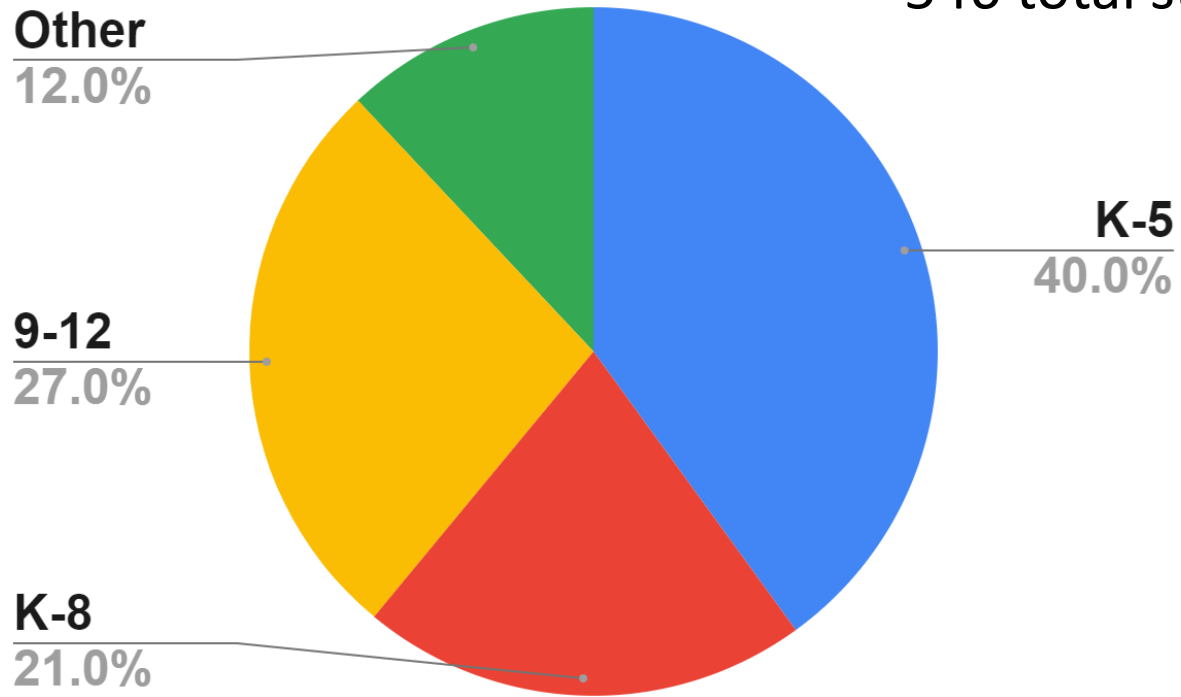
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# Staff responses



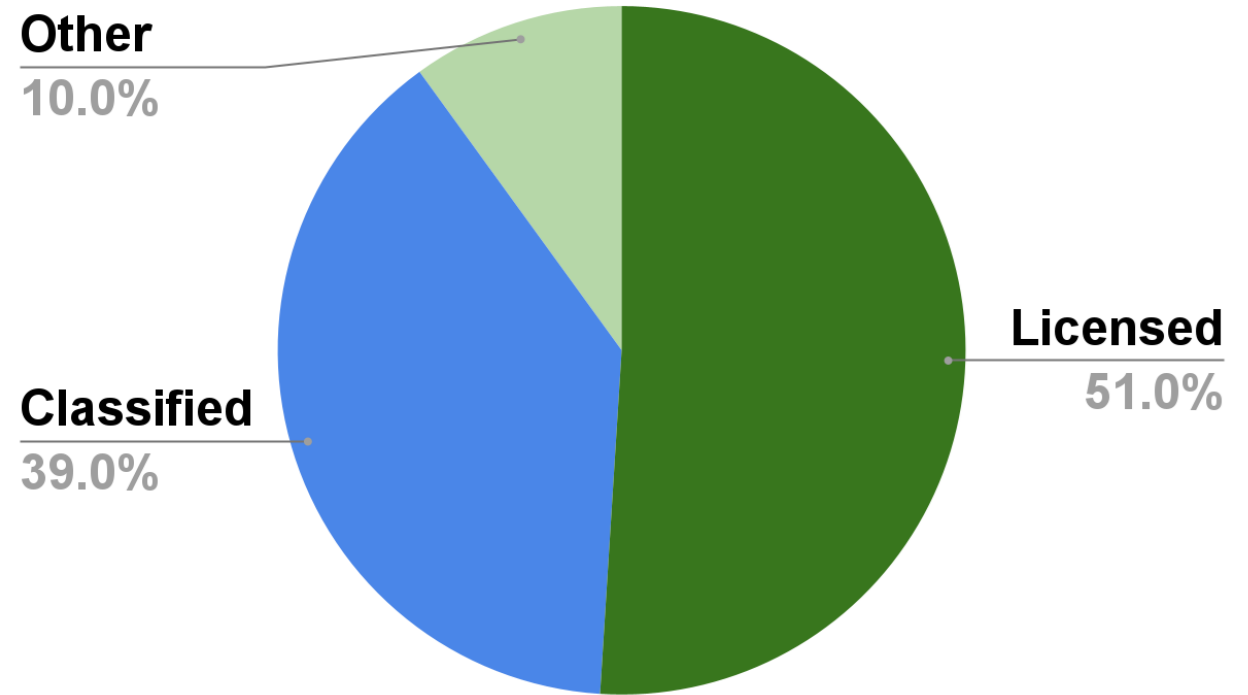
# Staff participation

546 total staff responses

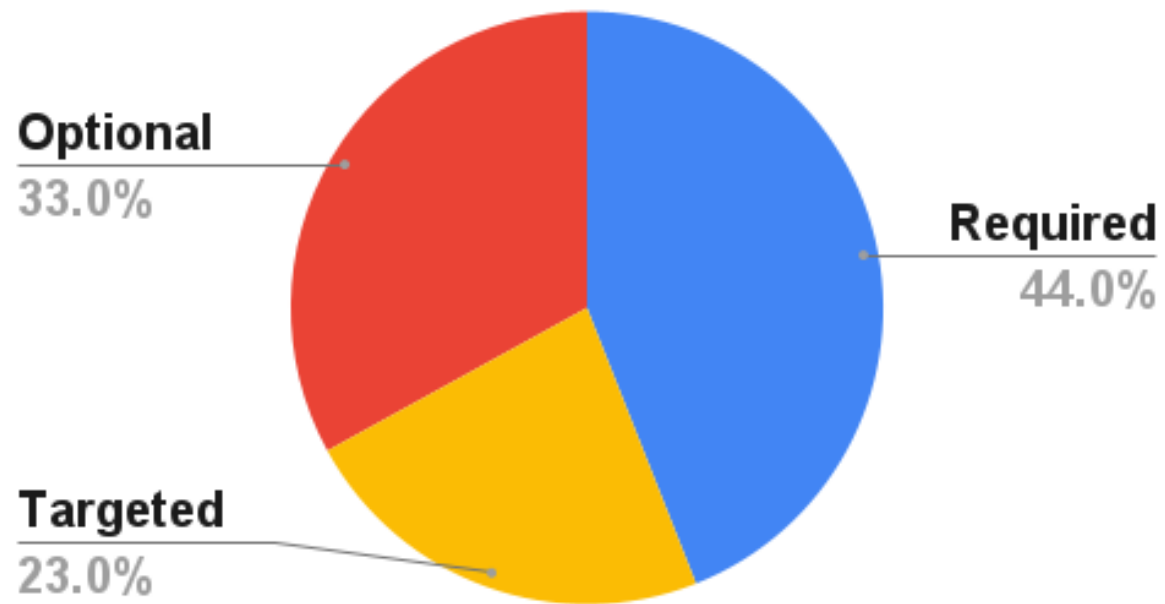


Staff participation by grade level

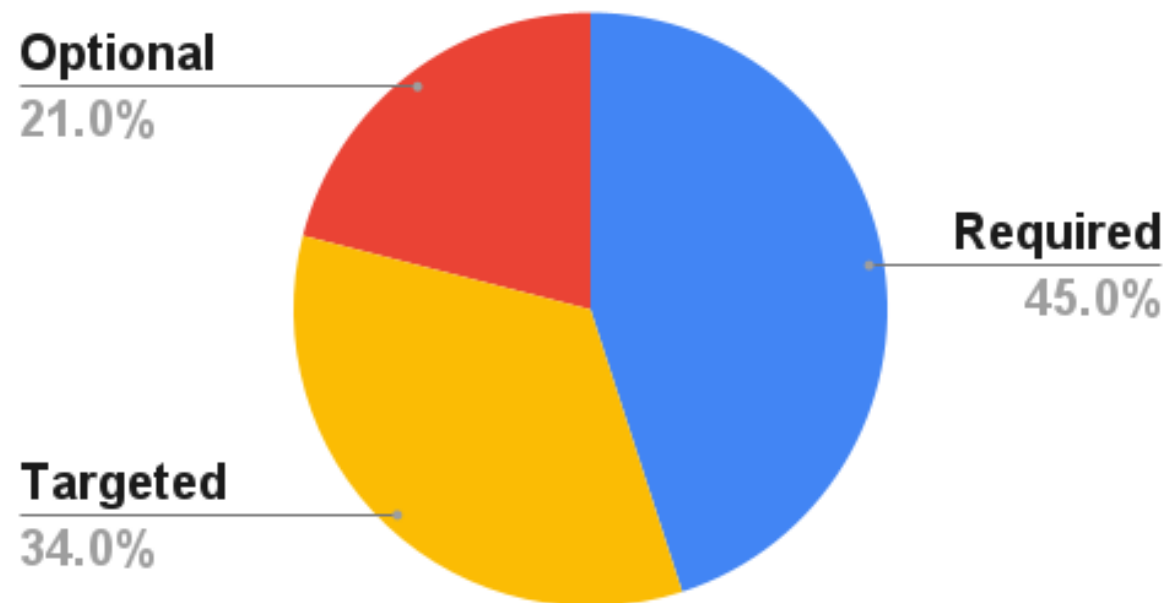
Staff participation by employee type



### Staff masking



### Student masking

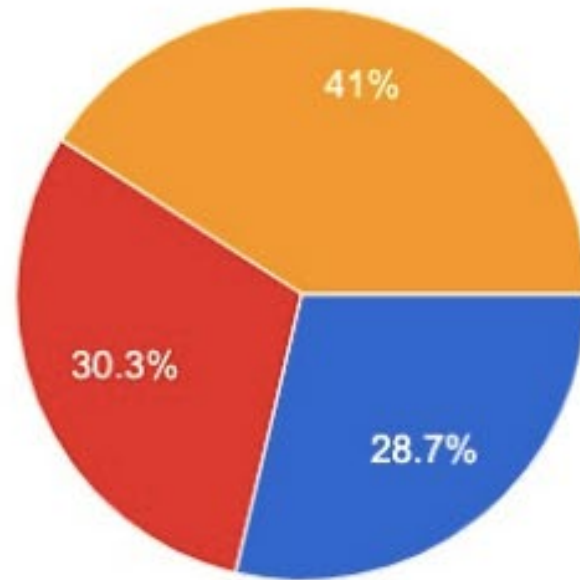




## EEA Survey Results (188 responses)

As of March 31, 2022, local school districts will have the power to decide whether to maintain the universal mask mandate or lift it. What would you like to see the Bethel school district decide on this matter?

188 responses



- Lift the mask mandate as soon as allowed (March 31).
- Use local COVID data to determine when conditions are safe enough to lift the mask mandate (i.e. county case rates, hospitalization rates, vaccination rates, etc.).
- Maintain the universal mask mandate for indoor spaces through the end of the 2021/22 school year.

# Top thoughts/concerns/suggestions expressed by staff

## If universal masking continues

- There should be mask breaks
- No masking outside
- Impedes teaching, learning and connection especially for younger students
- Mental health of students
- Sometimes puts staff at odds with students

## If masks are optional

- Students who choose to wear them could face increased ridicule
- Masking should be required if case rates creep up again
- Vulnerable students and staff will be at higher risk
- Students NEED to stay home when sick
- Some students unable to be vaccinated

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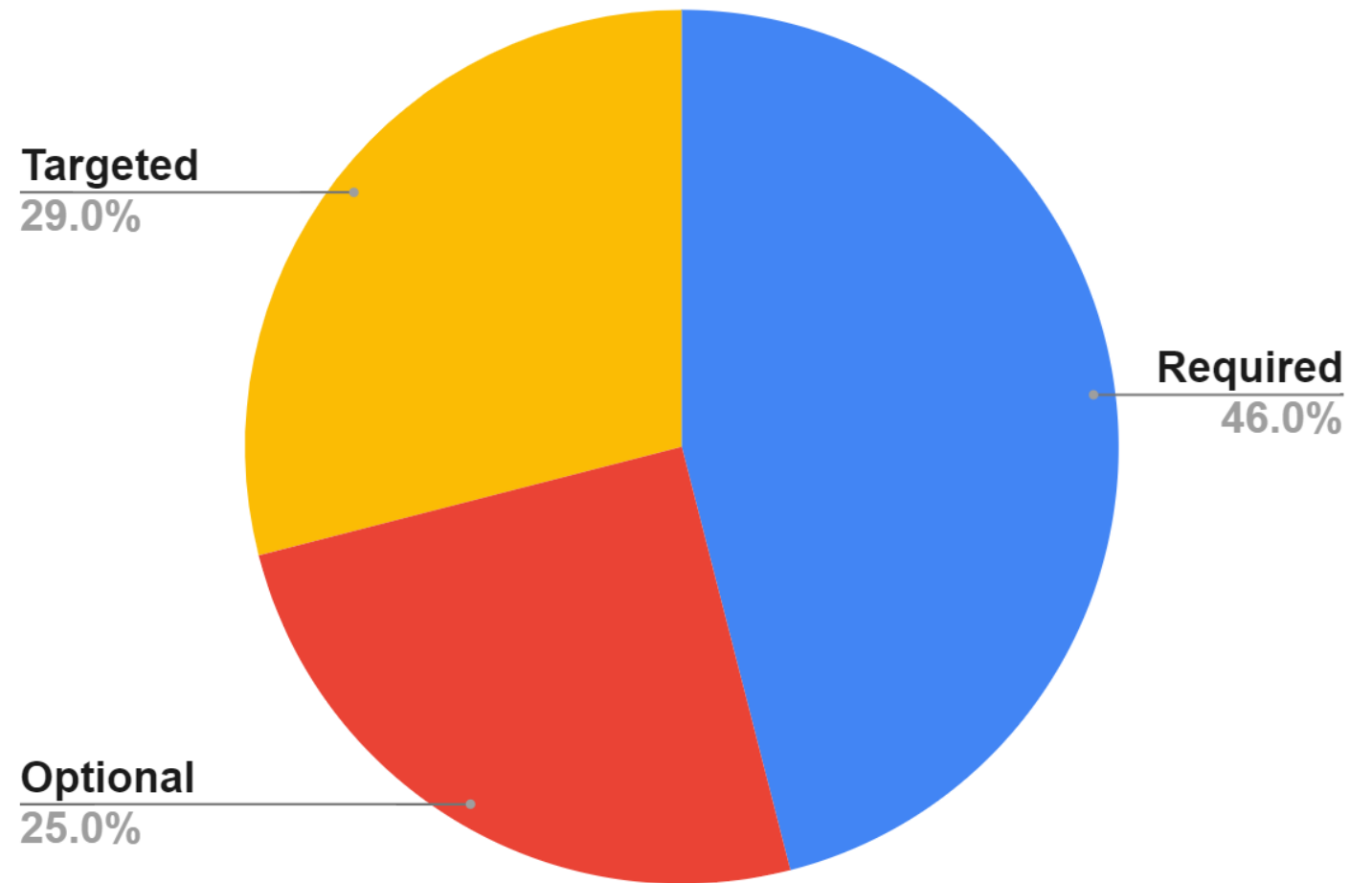
# Family responses



# Survey details

## Bethel Life Skills Families

- 24 respondents
- Direct outreach via phone calls to Life Skills families



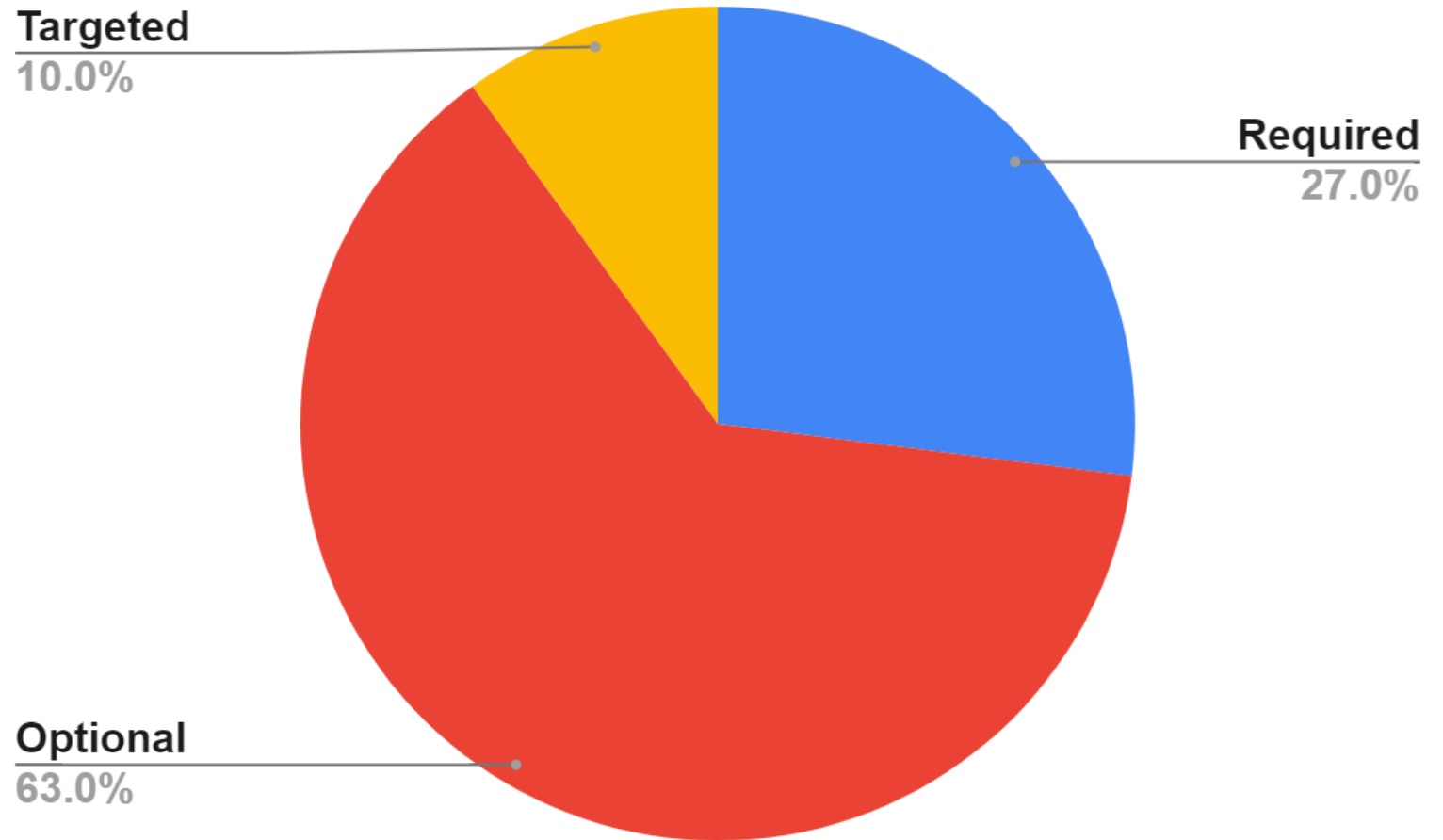
# Top thoughts/concerns/suggestions expressed by Life Skills Families

- Risk of lost learning with potential increased infection rates
- Students who are sick should wear masks
- Some high-risk students are unable to be vaccinated
- COVID is still circulating
- Students should have the choice / need rights
- Vaccine requirements should be considered
- Mask usage should be based on rate of vaccination in school/cohort

# Survey details

## Bethel Parent/Guardians

- 2,166 respondents



# Top thoughts/concerns/suggestions expressed by Bethel Parents/Guardians

## If Masks are required:

- Ongoing mental health impacts
- Speech and comprehension delays
- Impacts on student engagement + learning
- Inconsistency with community
- Limits spread, protects vulnerable people

## If masks are optional:

- Possible increased spread of COVID
- Increased risk for those who cannot be vaccinated
- Potential increased quarantine
- Sense of normalcy
- Becomes family choice

# Summary of Survey Results

## % Masks optional OR required in targeted situations

- 54% of families with students in life skill classrooms
- 56% of students in specific groups
- 56% of classified and licensed staff
- 59% of licensed teachers according to EEA survey\*
- 73% of students in the general population
- 73% of parents/guardians

\* masks optional or decision based on data



# Summary of Survey Results

- Majority of **students (60%)** and **families (73%)** who responded said that masks should be optional or worn in targeted spaces.
- A smaller majority of **staff (about 56%)** who responded said masks should be optional or worn in targeted places.
- All respondents had comments that will help shape our recommendation and implementation strategies

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Questions?



# Health Panel Input

February 28, 2022



# Members

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- Steve Adams, Lane County  
COVID-19 Incident  
Commander
- Brooke Cottle
- Alisha Dodds
- Sherine Forrest
- Tina Gutierrez-Schmich
- Dan Hedberg
- Malcolm McRae, Lane ESD  
Transition Specialist
- Jenny Sink
- Amy Tidwell

# Tasks

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Hold to the ideal of keeping students in school with minimal interruptions due to exposure, quarantine, or illness related to COVID-19

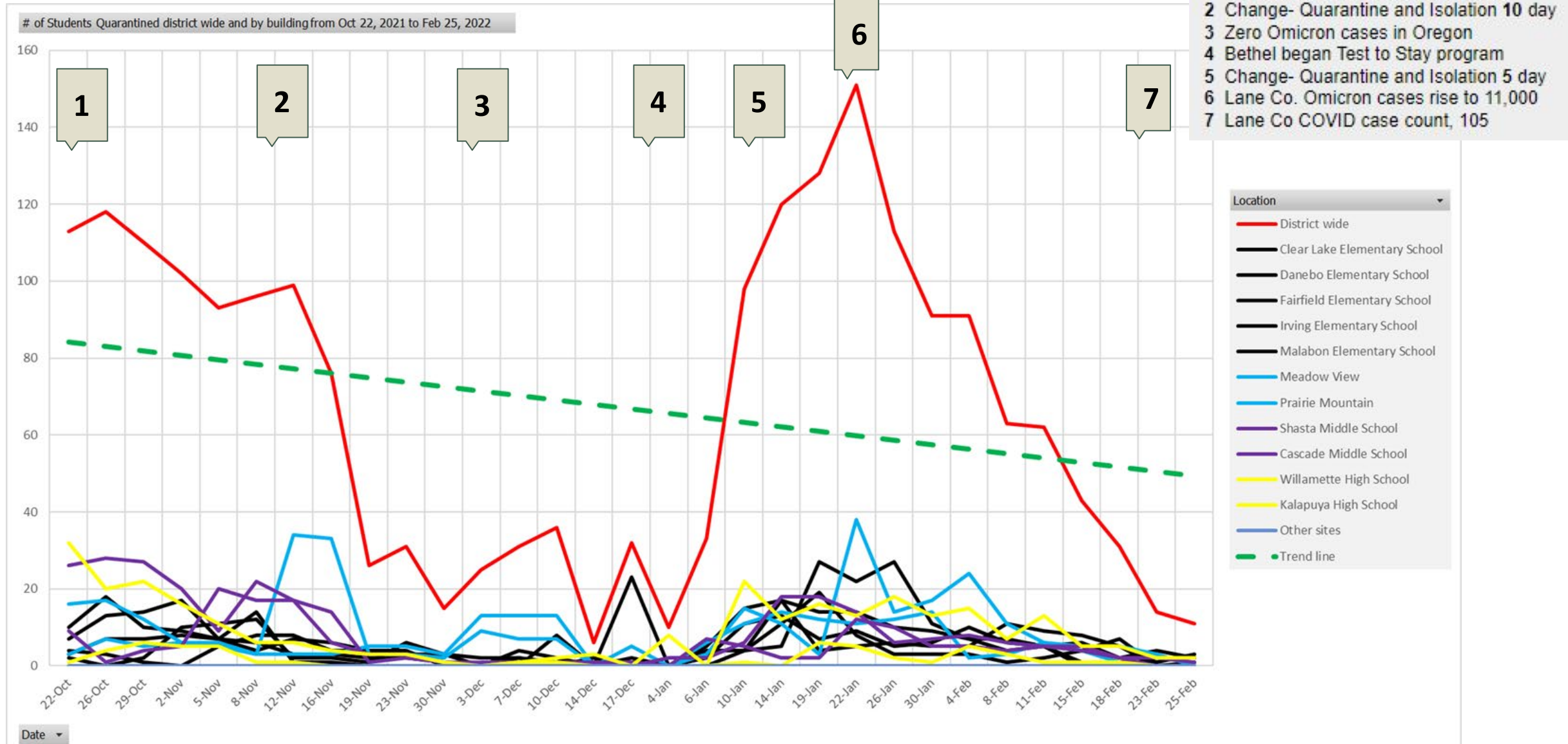
Review available data

Consider the intended or unintended consequences if the district maintains universal masking or shifts to optional masking





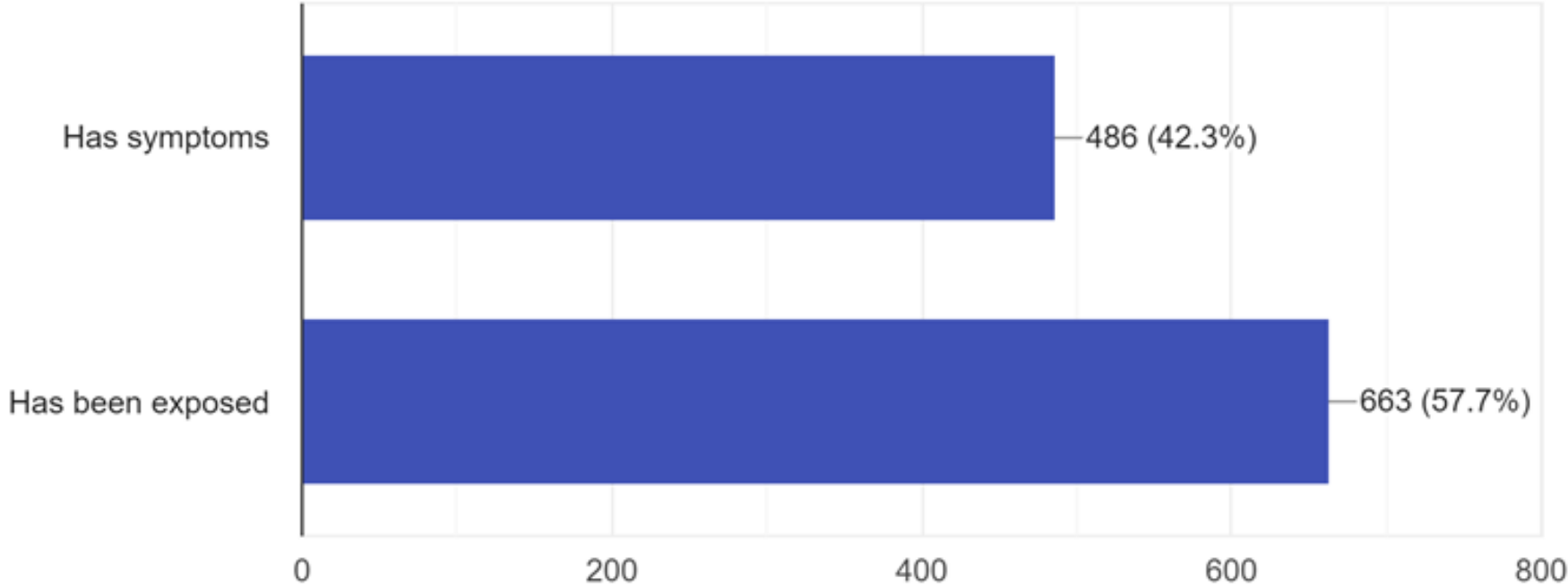
# Number of students quarantined





# Test to Stay data

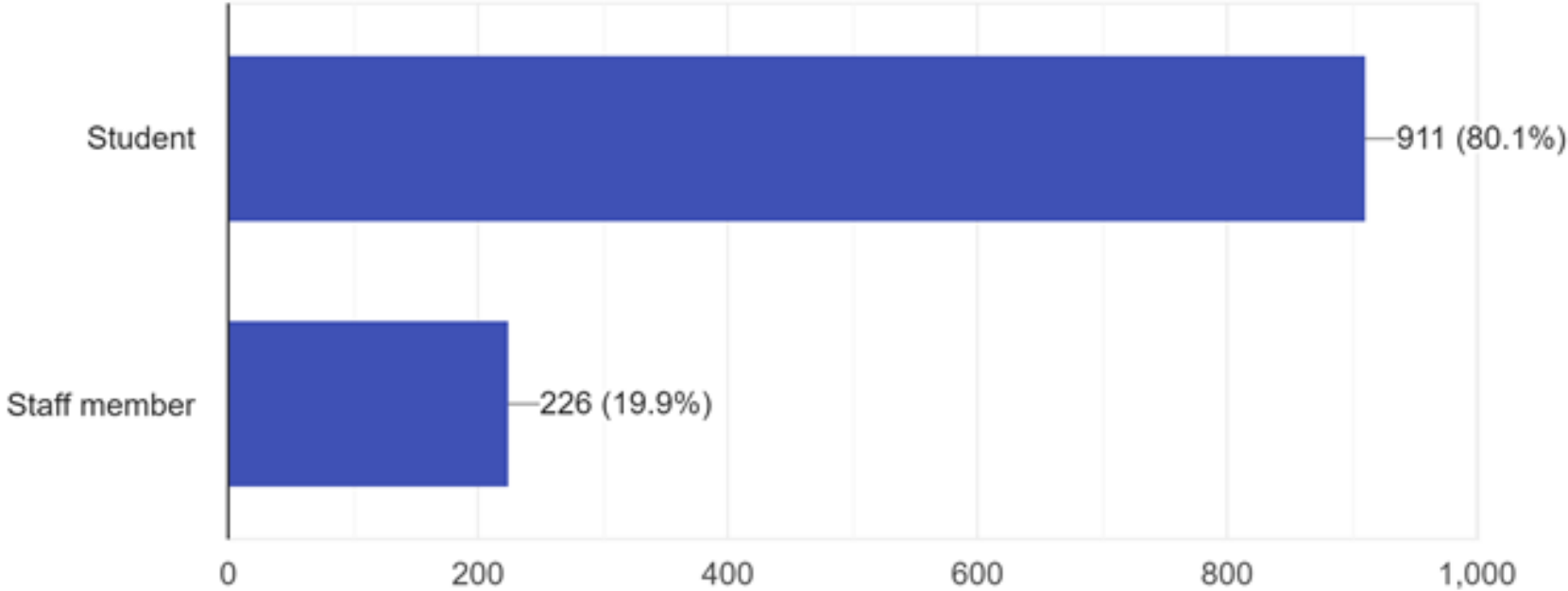
Reason for test:  
1,149 responses



# Who was tested

Is this a student or staff member?

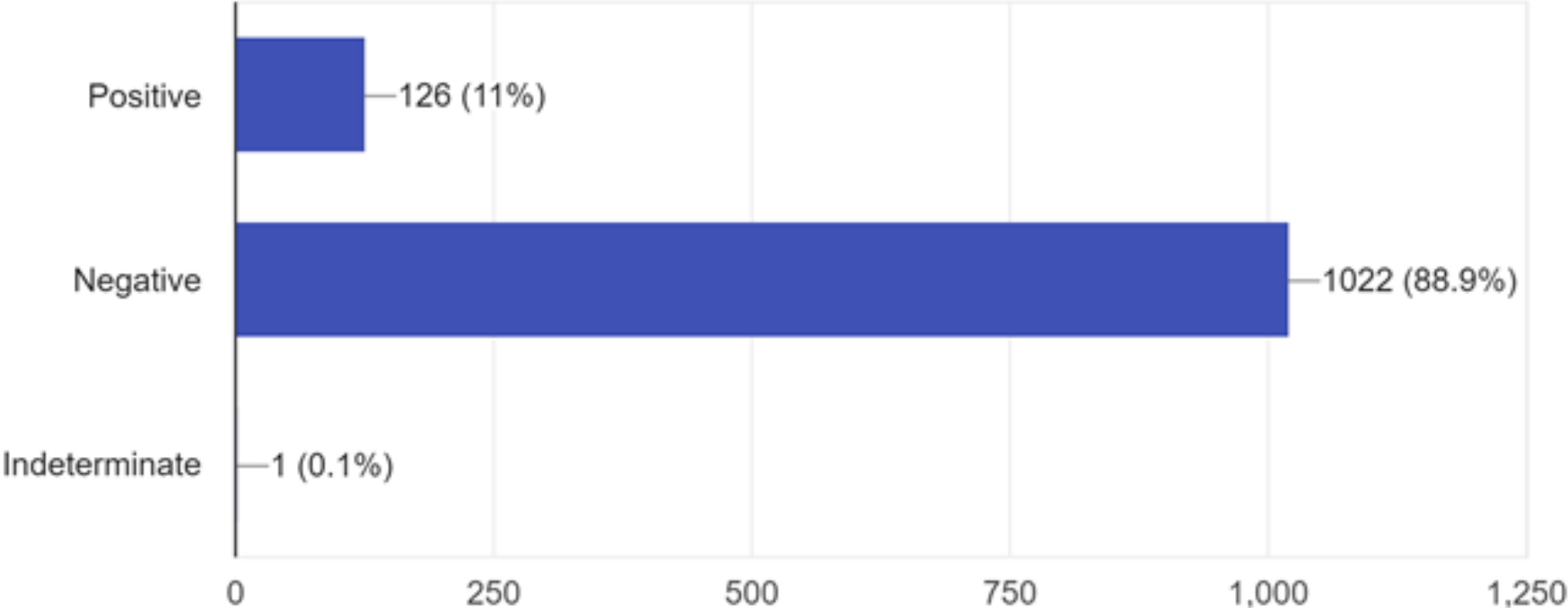
1,137 responses



# Test Results

Test result:

1,149 responses



# Maintaining Universal Masking

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## **INTENDED**

Part of layered mitigation efforts which result in less transmission in school and in community

Efforts are working, no significant school-based outbreaks

## **UNINTENDED**

Layered mitigation is potentially not as effective if masks are not required for students or staff during outside-of-school time

Ongoing interactions and reminders for students to wear masks appropriately, source of potential conflict

# Maintaining Universal Masking

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## **INTENDED**

Potentially safer for students and staff with underlying health conditions

We are in the habit of wearing masks

## **UNINTENDED**

Potential impact on academics, especially language and literacy development

Potential impact on social and emotional development with limited access to facial cues

Schools may be out of sync with the rest of the community which may not require masking

# Moving to **Optional** Masking

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## **INTENDED**

In alignment with the rest of the community

Learning and social interactions may improve without masks

Returning to regular school experiences for students

## **UNINTENDED**

Impact on staff time if contact tracing is required

Increased exposures, loss of time in school for students

Increased transmission may affect staffing

Potential risks for students and staff with underlying health conditions

# Moving to **Optional** Masking

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## **INTENDED**

Potential improvement of language and speech development

Have the option of requiring masking in specific context or programs

Allow for family or student choice

## **UNINTENDED**

Students and staff may not follow other measures

Possibility of polarization - pressure to wear or not to wear a mask

Increased exposure at school may put family members at home at risk

Differential treatment for staff and students in certain programs or contexts

# Questions?

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