

Date/Time Opened	Popular Topic	Contact Name	Comment	Attachments
12/22/2021 15:25	Mask Mandate in Schools	Marcia Smith	<p>Dear Mr. Dugan, I write as your constituent, a resident of Wasatch Hollow. I am by turns enraged and disheartened to learn that the Salt Lake City Council has chosen to extend Mayor Mendenhall's mask mandate for SLC schools. Why are you so opposed to children returning to normal life, the kind of life you no doubt enjoyed as a child and adolescent? I'm sure that you and the other Council members think that masks are effective mitigation for COVID-19 and that they are harmless. They are not harmless, and nearly two years on, it doesn't really matter if they are effective mitigations against COVID-19. It is past time for children's lives to stop being oriented around COVID-19. My daughter is a 13-year-old 8th grader. She wasn't able to return to school in person last year because of the debilitating social anxiety she developed over months of isolation and Zoom school (while parents in neighboring districts were able to choose whether to send their kids to school in person or have them attend online, my only choices were chain my kid to a computer for hours a day or move her to a school outside SLCS). I withdrew my daughter from school and homeschooled her for the last part of the 2020-21 school year. Finally, in late July, she worked up the courage to attend the last session of summer school. Only a few students wore masks, and my daughter enjoyed being back in school with other kids. When the school year started, I was dismayed at Mayor Mendenhall's mask mandate. I have been a Democratic voter all my life, and when the State Legislature ruled that mask mandates must be based on public health metrics, it was the first time I felt relieved to be living in a Republican-dominated state. I didn't care whether it was political theatrics or not, it was going to help my daughter return to something approaching normal life at school. Mayor Mendenhall's mandate was no less a political flex, but it was to my child's (and her peers') detriment. After three months masked at school, she has started putting her mask on in the car a block before we arrive there; when I pick her up, she won't take the mask off until we are well away from the school. She does not want anyone to see her face. My 13-year-old is afraid for her classmates and teachers to see her face. I'm going to say this again: My 13-year-old is afraid to show her whole face in public. I doubt she is the only one who has been affected in this way.</p>	

This is just one obvious and overt effect of masking at school. There are others, including the persistent reminder that things are not ok, which keeps kids (and adults) in a state of low-grade, or not so low-grade, fear and anxiety that is detrimental to both mental and physical health. After 21 months, it's time to get back to letting — and helping — kids feel like things are and will be ok. Full normalcy is what children need now — not "new normal", the old normal in which school is a place of unimpeded academic and social-emotional learning. I'm sure that many of your constituents will laud this action. There are many fearful people who care about avoiding COVID more than anything else. I care more about salvaging what's left of my daughter's childhood and doing everything possible to help her and her peers grow into well-adjusted adults. A life centered on avoiding a respiratory virus is no life. This is why I didn't take her out of school or make her start wearing masks in the past when she caught the flu at school (twice). Here's the thing: Without a mandate, everyone who wants their children to wear masks at school is free to have them do so. I feel certain that if the mask mandate is ever lifted, it will take my own child some time to put aside her mask, even though I would very much prefer that she not wear it. But the choice will be hers. I have a friend whose children go to school in Granite district (they left SLCS for educational reasons before the pandemic). My friend's kids wear masks at school, but hardly anyone else does. Have they caught COVID? No. Have they lost days of school because of exposure? No. Have students and teachers been dropping dead at their school? No. All over the state, all over the country, and all over the world, children are enjoying school free from masks and other disruptive mitigation measures. Why must children in Salt Lake City continue to be held hostage to adult fears? Sincerely, Marcia Smith