

COVID-19 Fact Sheet

Michigan School Districts' Legal Authority and Responsibility to Protect Students from COVID-19

Introduction


In Michigan, school districts and local health departments have separate and distinct, though overlapping, legal authority to protect students within their jurisdiction. There are separate laws, practical considerations, and liability risks that affect each entity and their decisions about whether, when, and how to take protective actions. A decidedly unhelpful strategy is to wait for another entity to act, since the existence of overlapping legal authority does not legally protect an entity that fails to act. As we saw during the Flint water crisis, deference that leads to inaction can tragically compromise the public's health and trust and can lead to liability for entities and officials who fail to exercise their legal authority.

Questions:

- What legal authority and responsibility do Michigan public school districts possess to protect students from COVID-19?
- What are the legal risks associated with a Michigan public school district's failure to implement evidence-based COVID-19 prevention measures?
- How does a Michigan public school district's authority intersect with a local health department's authority to require masks or other COVID-19 prevention measures in schools?

Summary

Michigan public schools have independent legal authority and responsibility to protect students' safety, health, and welfare. This includes ensuring that all children, including students with disabilities, have equal access to free and appropriate public education. Schools that fail to provide a safe environment for students to learn may face liability if they refuse to implement reasonable evidence-based protective measures such as mask requirements and social distancing. Moreover, schools may face added financial risks as some liability



insurance coverage excludes coverage for communicable diseases, while other insurers have indicated that they will not cover claims arising from COVID-19.

Discussion

Michigan public schools have legal authority and responsibility to protect students and staff from COVID-19. School districts should be particularly attuned to federal anti-discrimination laws and state tort laws that may expose the district to liability for failing to implement reasonable public health measures during a pandemic. Following are considerations for school districts seeking to protect the safety and wellbeing of students and staff, comply with civil rights laws, and limit their potential liability.

I. Michigan Public Schools Have Independent Legal Authority and Responsibility to Protect Students and Staff from COVID-19

Schools in Michigan have long played a crucial role in protecting their students' health, including by implementing measures to prevent the spread of communicable diseases. For example, schools have historically worked collaboratively with state and local health departments to monitor compliance with immunization requirements.¹ Additionally, Michigan's communicable disease rules expressly authorize school officials to exclude a student from school who they "reasonably suspect[]" has a communicable disease "for a period sufficient to obtain a determination by a physician or local health officer as to the presence of a communicable disease."²

In addition to their specific public health responsibilities, Michigan law further grants school districts general authority to protect students' health and safety. Specifically, Michigan's Revised School Code provides:


(3) A general powers school district has all of the rights, powers, and duties expressly stated in this act; may exercise a power implied or incident to a power expressly stated in this act; and, except as otherwise provided by law, may exercise a power incidental or appropriate to the performance of a function related to operation of a public school and the provision of public education services in the interests of public elementary and secondary education in the school district, including, but not limited to, all of the following:

...

(b) Providing for the safety and welfare of pupils while at school or a school sponsored activity or while en route to or from school or a school sponsored activity.³

Courts have recognized that this statute grants school districts "very broad powers of self-governance"⁴ to adopt policies to protect student welfare, such as policies banning firearms at schools⁵ and banning peanut and tree-nut products due to a student's allergies.⁶

School districts' failure to use their legal authority to reasonably protect students from COVID-19 may expose them to legal action. For example, Wisconsin parents filed federal lawsuits in October 2021 against school districts alleging that the schools' reckless failure to implement reasonable COVID precautions constitutes a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment and a public nuisance causing particularized harm to the plaintiffs.⁷ The plaintiffs seek injunctive relief, alleging that the school districts have an affirmative duty to protect students under the Fourteenth Amendment based on the state-created danger doctrine and the special relationship between students and school administration.⁸ The lawsuit further alleges that the school districts' reckless



conduct causes the spread of COVID-19 within schools which interferes with the general public's right to be free from unnecessary exposure to infectious diseases. The cases are pending review. History provides some precedence for Constitutional claims as well; for instance, at least one state supreme court has found that religious exemptions to vaccination requirements violate the U.S. Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment by denying equal protection of the laws to other children in the school community.⁹ School districts' potential liability under federal civil rights laws and tort law is further discussed below.


In addition to protecting student safety, schools must also maintain safe workplaces for their employees. The Michigan Occupational Health and Safety Act creates a duty for employers to provide to all employees "a place of employment that is free from recognized hazards that are causing, or are likely to cause, death or serious physical harm to the employee."¹⁰ Violations of the Act may result in civil and/or criminal penalties.¹¹ The Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration encourages employers to follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendation to require face coverings for all employees and visitors when indoors, including those who are fully vaccinated in areas of substantial or high transmission.¹²

Beyond state law requirements, school districts must also comply with federal orders governing mask wearing on school buses. The CDC issued an Order on January 29, 2021, requiring passengers and drivers to wear masks during transport.¹³ In an FAQ regarding the Order, the agency stated that passengers and drivers on public and private school buses must wear a mask.¹⁴ The Order remains in effect. Conveyance operators—including individuals who operate the vehicle and individuals and organizations who authorize the vehicle's operation—must employ "best efforts" to assure compliance by all passengers.¹⁵

II. Schools Have Safety Obligations Under Federal Civil Rights Laws

Schools also have obligations under federal anti-discrimination laws to accommodate and include children with disabilities in educational settings. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 guarantees access to a free appropriate public education for all students in schools that receive federal funding.¹⁶ The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that schools make programs accessible and provide equal opportunities to education for students with disabilities.¹⁷ Parents of children with disabilities have filed lawsuits against states, with school districts and school boards also named as defendants, alleging violations of federal disability laws because it is unsafe for their children to attend school without a mask mandate in place.¹⁸ A federal district court in Iowa granted plaintiffs' motions for a temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction on the grounds that a state law prohibiting school mask mandates likely violates Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.¹⁹ In the subsequent appeal, the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals found that "federal disability law requires mask wearing as a reasonable accommodation" to ensure a safe school environment.²⁰ Similarly, in Tennessee, federal district courts granted plaintiffs' motions for preliminary injunction, finding that a parental opt-out provision in a school mask mandate likely violates the rights of students with disabilities.²¹

Parents who oppose mask mandates have also filed lawsuits. However, although parents have the right to "determine and direct the care, teaching, and education of their children in public schools" under Michigan law,²² these rights are not absolute and are in fact "subject to the school's broad authority to provide for the safety and welfare of its students while at school."²³ Likewise, the U.S. Supreme Court has held that the "rights of parenthood" are not "beyond limitation," noting that "parents may be free to become martyrs themselves. But it does not follow they are free, in identical circumstances, to make martyrs of their children . . ."²⁴ Accordingly, federal courts have repeatedly upheld immunization requirements for school entry²⁵ and school policies such as dress codes.²⁶ Furthermore, in recent months courts have upheld COVID-19 school mask mandates.²⁷



U.S. Department of Education (DOE) Secretary Miguel Cardona has indicated that the DOE is taking necessary legal actions to ensure compliance with federal civil rights statutes and secure the safety of all students upon return to in-person instruction.²⁸ In a letter to the Florida Department of Education, the DOE Office of Civil Rights noted that the state’s “policy requiring public schools and school districts to allow parents to opt their children out of mask mandates may be preventing schools in Florida from meeting their legal obligations not to discriminate based on disability and from providing an equal educational opportunity to students with disabilities who are at heightened risk of severe illness from COVID-19.”²⁹

III. Governmental Immunity Does Not Apply to Gross Negligence

Michigan public schools are generally immune from tort liability, but governmental liability protections do not apply when “gross negligence ... is the proximate cause of the injury or damage.”³⁰ Gross negligence is defined as “conduct so reckless as to demonstrate a substantial lack of concern for whether an injury results.”³¹ Accordingly, school districts should consider potential tort liability exposure. Given CDC, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), and other state and federal agency guidance, an attorney representing a student infected with COVID-19 at school may argue that the school district was on notice of the foreseeability of harm from COVID-19 and failed to exercise reasonable care to prevent it. If a school district does not take reasonable evidence-based measures, such as implementing a mask mandate, to provide for the safety and welfare of students, its failure to act may be evidence of gross negligence.³² Although proximate cause can be difficult to prove, the link between a school outbreak and a child’s infection may be strong enough to encourage lawsuits by parents whose children are harmed.

Because schools have the authority to implement protective measures, they can take steps to potentially limit their exposure to liability by requiring masks to prevent foreseeable COVID-19 transmission in schools.³³ The CDC recommends universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status.³⁴ MDHHS also recommends universal masking for students, staff, and visitors regardless of vaccination status.³⁵ A court might consider these recommendations in evaluating the reasonableness of a school’s COVID-19 precautions or lack thereof.

School districts should consult their risk managers and legal counsel when determining which COVID-19 prevention measures to implement. They should also assess their liability insurance policies as some policies exclude communicable diseases from coverage and other insurers have indicated that they will not cover claims arising from COVID-19.³⁶ As such, school districts may be liable for legal costs and damages resulting from a civil lawsuit.³⁷ Furthermore, even if the school district is not ultimately held responsible for harm caused by a COVID-19 outbreak, it might still be responsible for attorney fees associated with its defense if not covered by insurance.

IV. Role of Local Health Departments

Local health departments have authority within their jurisdictions to prevent disease and promote the public health through regulations and orders, including emergency orders to prohibit gatherings and establish procedures to be followed (including by a local governmental entity) during an epidemic to insure continuation of essential public health services and enforcement of health laws.³⁸ In addition, a local health officer may exclude from school a student or individual who has or is suspected of having a communicable disease.³⁹ The Michigan Public Health Code grants local health departments considerable discretion in executing their

duties.⁴⁰ Furthermore, if a local health department orders preventive measures that are more protective than those issued by a school, case law suggests that the local health department's orders would prevail.⁴¹

Nevertheless, a local health department's authority and actions are independent of a school district's authority and actions. Were a student or staff member to sue a school district for injuries arising from school-based COVID-19 exposure, most likely, the school district could not squarely blame its failure to implement preventive measures on a local health department's failure to require them. Although local health departments may serve as valuable partners and advisors to school districts in responding to health threats—and, indeed, may require protective interventions—school districts remain responsible for executing their independent legal authority to protect students who are on school property or under school supervision and control. In the absence of an applicable local health department order, schools may consult a local health department for expertise on reasonable measures to protect the safety and welfare of students, but they do not need a health department order to act. Indeed, federal courts have held that school districts may rely on health department recommendations to implement protective measures, even if they are not issued as an order.⁴²

School districts' direct intervention is more important than ever given confusion arising from a new Michigan budget bill enacted on September 29, 2021. The bill includes provisions that purport to prohibit local health officers from implementing school mask mandates⁴³ and withhold funding from a local health department that issues emergency epidemic orders without the support of its county board of commissioners.⁴⁴ The Governor's legal team⁴⁵ and local health department legal counsel⁴⁶ have asserted that the provisions are unconstitutional and therefore unenforceable, but the provisions have nevertheless had a chilling effect on local health department actions to protect students. Amidst this confusion, it is imperative that schools shoulder their unequivocal authority and responsibility to independently implement measures to protect student health.

SUPPORTERS



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Appendix: Case Summaries

This appendix provides brief summaries of the key cases cited in this fact sheet. It does not reflect an exhaustive review of all cases referenced in the fact sheet nor all potentially relevant cases.

I. Michigan School Districts' Authority to Protect Health and Safety

- *Liebau v. Romeo Community Schools*, 2013 WL 3942392 (Mich. Ct. App. 2013) (unpublished)

A school implemented a ban on all peanut and tree-nut products at the school because a student had a severe, life-threatening allergy aggravated by airborne exposure to nuts. The allergy was considered a disability and the policy was implemented under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. A parent opposed the policy and sought injunctive relief. The Court of Appeals affirmed the trial court's order granting defendant's motion for summary disposition, dismissing the plaintiff's complaint. The court recognized that the school's authority to implement the nut policy was based on MCL 380.11a, which "vests broad authority in school districts to adopt policies to ensure the safety and welfare of its students while at school."

- *Mich. Gun Owners, Inc. v. Ann Arbor Public Schools*, 318 Mich. App. 338 (Mich. Ct. App. 2016)

A gun owners' association filed a lawsuit against a school district challenging the district's policy banning the possession of firearms in schools and at school-sponsored events. The court found in favor of the school district's policy, finding that the state legislature has broadly empowered school districts to provide for the safety and welfare of students in school under MCL 380.11a.

- *Mich. Open Carry Inc. v. Clio Area School District*, 318 Mich. App. 356 (Mich. Ct. App. 2016).

A gun rights group challenged a school district policy banning the possession of firearms in schools and at school-sponsored events. The court upheld the school policy, citing school districts' broad powers under MCL 380.11a and concluding that state law did not preempt the school district's policy.

II. Disability Rights


- *Arc of Iowa v. Reynolds*, 2021 WL 4166728 (S.D. Iowa Sept. 13, 2021)

Parents of children with disabilities challenged an Iowa statute banning local school districts from implementing universal mask policies on school property. Plaintiffs demonstrated that they were likely to succeed on the merits of their Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act claims. The court granted plaintiffs' motion for a temporary restraining order.

- *Arc of Iowa v. Reynolds*, 2021 WL 4737902 (S.D. Iowa Oct. 8, 2021)

After granting plaintiffs' motion for a temporary restraining order, the court then granted plaintiffs' request for a preliminary injunction. The district court enjoined the governor and schools from enforcing the Iowa statute banning universal mask policies.

- *Arc of Iowa v. Reynolds*, 2022 WL 211215 (8th Cir. Jan. 25, 2022)



The Eighth Circuit narrowed the scope of the district court’s preliminary injunction, holding that the preliminary injunction applies only to the schools and districts that the plaintiffs attend. The Circuit Court remanded the case to the district court.

- *Disability Rights South Carolina v. McMaster*, 2021 WL 4444841 (D.S.C. Sept. 28, 2021), *vacated in part on other grounds*

A South Carolina law prohibited school districts from using appropriated or authorized funds to announce or enforce a mask mandate. Disability rights advocates and parents, on behalf of their children with disabilities, sought a preliminary injunction and a temporary restraining order, alleging violations of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act. The court granted plaintiffs’ motions finding that the advocates were likely to succeed on the merits and suffer irreparable harm in the absence of injunctive relief and that the balance of equities and public interest factors weighed in favor of injunction.

- *Disability Rights South Carolina v. McMaster*, 2022 WL 214094 (4th Cir. Jan. 25, 2022)

The Fourth Circuit vacated the district court’s order in part and remanded to the district court with instructions to dismiss the claims against the governor and attorney general for lack of standing, finding that the alleged injuries were not fairly traceable to the governor and attorney general and an injunction would not likely redress the alleged injuries.

- *G.S. by & through Schwaigert v. Lee*, No. 21-CV-02552-SHL-ATC, 2021 WL 4268285 (W.D. Tenn. Sept. 17, 2021)

Parents of students with disabilities brought an action against the governor and county alleging that an executive order providing an opt-out provision to a mask mandate denied students with disabilities their rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act. The court granted plaintiffs’ motion for preliminary injunction.

- *G.S. by & through Schwaigert v. Lee*, No. 21-5915, 2021 WL 5411218 (6th Cir. Nov. 19, 2021)

The Sixth Circuit denied the governor’s motion for a stay pending appeal of the preliminary injunction.

- *R.K. by & through J.K. v. Lee*, No. 3:21-CV-00853, 2021 WL 5860924 (M.D. Tenn. Dec. 10, 2021)

Parents of children with disabilities sought a temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction in a challenge to a state statute prohibiting school districts, except in rare circumstances, from requiring individuals to wear face coverings on school property. The plaintiffs alleged violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Rehabilitation Act, and the Supremacy Clause. The court granted plaintiffs’ motions.

III. Constitutional Challenges

a. Substantive Due Process/Parental Rights

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- *Prince v. Massachusetts*, 321 U.S. 158 (1944)

Prince violated a law regarding the employment of children. The court found that the rights of parenthood are not beyond limitation and that while parents can choose to become martyrs themselves, it does not follow that they are free “to make martyrs of their children before they have reached the age of full and legal discretion when they can make that choice for themselves.”

- *Blau v. Fort Thomas Pub. Sch. Dist.*, 401 F.3d 381(6th Cir. 2005)

A parent challenged a school district’s dress code alleging violations of the First Amendment free speech clause and the Fourteenth Amendment due process clause. The district court granted summary judgment for the school district. The Sixth Circuit affirmed on the grounds that the free speech clause did not protect the student from the dress code restrictions, rational basis review applied, the parent did not have a fundamental right to exempt his child from the school dress code, and the dress code did not violate the student’s or parent’s state constitutional rights to be free from arbitrary and capricious state action.

- *Workman v. Mingo Cty. Bd. of Educ.*, 419 F. App’x 348 (4th Cir. 2011) (unpublished)

A mother filed a civil rights action alleging that state and county officials violated her constitutional rights in refusing to admit her daughter to public school without immunizations required by state law. The district court granted summary judgment for the defendants. The Fourth Circuit affirmed on the grounds that the state had a compelling interest to require children to be vaccinated before attending public school and there was no violation of the mother’s due process rights, the mother’s right to freely exercise her religion, or the mother or minor child’s equal protection rights.

- *Oberheim v. Bason*, No. 4:21-CV-01566, 2021 WL 4478333 (M.D. Pa. Sept. 30, 2021)


Parents challenged the constitutionality of a school district’s policy requiring students to wear masks while on school premises and buses. The court denied the parents’ motion for preliminary injunction on the grounds that the policy did not implicate a liberty or property interest, the parents were unlikely to succeed on the merits of their procedural due process claim, the policy survived rational basis review, the policy did not significantly burden students’ right to freely associate, the students were unlikely to suffer irreparable harm because of the mask mandate, and the public interest did not weigh in favor of issuance of a preliminary injunction.

b. Equal Protection

- *Zucht v. King*, 260 U.S. 174 (1922)

Public officials in San Antonio excluded a child from school because she did not have the required vaccinations. The Supreme Court held that it is within the police power of the state to provide for compulsory vaccination and that an ordinance excluding unvaccinated children from schools falls within the broad discretion required for the protection of public health. Furthermore, the ordinance “is not violative of the equal protection clause merely because it is not all-embracing.”

- *Workman v. Mingo Cty. Bd. of Educ.*, 419 F. App’x 348 (4th Cir. 2011) (unpublished)



As described under Part III-a above, a mother filed a civil rights action alleging that state and county officials violated her constitutional rights in refusing to admit her daughter to public school without immunizations required by state law. The district court granted summary judgment for the defendants. The Fourth Circuit affirmed on the grounds that the state had a compelling interest to require children to be vaccinated before attending public school and there was no violation of the mother's due process rights, the mother's right to freely exercise her religion, or the mother or minor child's equal protection rights.

- *W.S. by Sonderman v. Ragsdale*, No. 1:21-CV-01560-TWT, 2021 WL 2024687 (N.D. Ga. May 12, 2021)

Students sued the school district superintendent alleging that a rule requiring students to wear face coverings violated their rights under the equal protection clauses of state and federal constitutions. The court applied rational basis review and found that the students were unlikely to succeed on the merits of their claims. The students also failed to show they would suffer irreparable harm without injunctive relief. Finally, the risk of harm to the opposing party and public interest factors weighed against granting injunctive relief.

- *Brown v. Stone*, 378 So.2d 218 (Miss. 1979)

The Mississippi Supreme Court held that a statute requiring immunization against certain diseases for school admission served an overriding and compelling public interest and was a reasonable exercise of the state's police power. The Court struck down a religious exception to the immunization requirement, finding that the exception violated the equal protection clause by discriminating against children whose parents do not have religious beliefs which conflict with immunization requirements.

c. First Amendment


- *Blau v. Fort Thomas Pub. Sch. Dist.*, 401 F.3d 381(6th Cir. 2005)

As described under Part III-a above, a parent challenged a school district's dress code alleging violations of the First Amendment free speech clause and the Fourteenth Amendment due process clause. The district court granted summary judgment for the school district. The Sixth Circuit affirmed on the grounds that the free speech clause did not protect the student from the dress code restrictions, rational basis review applied, the parent did not have a fundamental right to exempt his child from the school dress code, and the dress code did not violate the student's or parent's state constitutional rights to be free from arbitrary and capricious state action.

- *Workman v. Mingo Cty. Bd. of Educ.*, 419 F. App'x 348 (4th Cir. 2011) (unpublished)

As described under Parts III-a and -b above, a mother filed a civil rights action alleging that state and county officials violated her constitutional rights in refusing to admit her daughter to public school without immunizations required by state law. The district court granted summary judgment for the defendants. The Fourth Circuit affirmed on the grounds that the state had a compelling interest to require children to be vaccinated before attending public school and there was no violation of the mother's due process rights, the mother's right to freely exercise her religion, or the mother or minor child's equal protection rights.

- *Resurrection School v. Hertel*, 11 F.4th 437 (6th Cir. 2021)



A private religious elementary school and two parents filed a Section 1983 action against Michigan state and local officials, challenging the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services orders requiring all persons five years of age and older to wear face masks in public settings including schools. The Sixth Circuit held that the orders did not violate the Free Exercise Clause because they were neutral and of general applicability and satisfied rational basis review. The court also rejected the plaintiffs' equal protection and substantive due process claims as duplicative of the plaintiffs' free exercise arguments.

- *Resurrection Sch. v. Hertel*, 16 F.4th 1215 (6th Cir. 2021)

The Sixth Circuit, en banc, vacated the previous judgment, stayed the mandate, and restored the case as a pending appeal.

- *Geerlings v. Tredyffrin/Easttown Sch. Dist.*, No. 21-CV-4024, 2021 WL 4399672 (E.D. Pa. Sept. 27, 2021)

Pennsylvania's Acting Secretary of Health ordered that all schools require face coverings for students except those with a medical exemption. Plaintiffs opposed the order for religious reasons and sought emergency injunctive relief. Plaintiffs' motion was denied on the grounds that they were unlikely to succeed on the merits.

- *Oberheim v. Bason*, No. 4:21-CV-01566, 2021 WL 4478333 (M.D. Pa. Sept. 30, 2021)

As described under Part III-a above, parents challenged the constitutionality of a school district's policy requiring students to wear masks while on school premises and buses. The court denied the parents' motion for preliminary injunction on the grounds that the policy did not implicate a liberty or property interest, the parents were unlikely to succeed on the merits of their procedural due process claim, the policy survived rational basis review, the policy did not significantly burden students' First Amendment right to freely associate, the students were unlikely to suffer irreparable harm because of the mask mandate, and the public interest did not weigh in favor of issuance of a preliminary injunction.

- *L.T. v. Zucker*, No. 121CV1034LEKDJS, 2021 WL 4775215 (N.D.N.Y. Oct. 13, 2021)


Through their parents, plaintiff students sued the Commissioner of Health for New York State seeking to enjoin enforcement of a K-12 school mask mandate. The court found that the plaintiffs did not demonstrate a likelihood of success on the merits of their argument that the mask mandate violated the First Amendment.

IV. Relationship to Local Health Department

- *People ex rel. Hill v. Bd. of Ed. of City of Lansing*, 224 Mich. 388 (1923)

The city board of health required vaccination of students in the public schools as a condition of admission. The court held that the city board of health could require the board of education to enforce the regulation by excluding unvaccinated students from schools.

- *W.S. by Sonderman v. Ragsdale*, No. 1:21-CV-01560-TWT, 2021 WL 2024687 (N.D. Ga. May 12, 2021)



As described further above in Part III-b, students sued the school district superintendent alleging that a rule requiring students to wear face coverings violated their rights under the equal protection clauses of state and federal constitutions. The court applied rational basis review and found that the students were unlikely to succeed on the merits of their claims. The court found that the school district has “a right to rely on the recommendations given by reputable public health authorities, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Georgia Department of Public Health, when deciding how to combat COVID-19.”

- *L.T. v. Zucker*, No. 121CV1034LEKDJS, 2021 WL 4775215 (N.D.N.Y. Oct. 13, 2021)

As described further above in Part III-c, plaintiff students sued the Commissioner of Health for New York State seeking to enjoin enforcement of a K-12 school mask mandate. The court found that the plaintiffs did not demonstrate a likelihood of success on the merits of their argument that the mask mandate violated the First Amendment. The court explained that, “[s]tate authorities must be allowed to rely on recommendations given by reputable public health authorities such as the CDC and WHO in the face of an ongoing pandemic.”

¹ MCL 380.1177; Mich. Admin. Code R. 325.176.

² Mich. Admin. Code R. 325.175(2).

³ MCL 380.11a (applicable to general powers school districts). *See also* MCL 380.401a (applicable to first class school districts); MCL 380.601a (applicable to intermediate school districts); MCL 380.382 (applicable to community districts).

⁴ Mich. Gun Owners, Inc. v. Ann Arbor Public Schools, 318 Mich. App. 338 (Mich. Ct. App. 2016).

⁵ Mich. Gun Owners Inc., 318 Mich. App. at 348-55; Mich. Open Carry Inc. v. Clio Area School District, 318 Mich. App. 356 (Mich. Ct. App. 2016).

⁶ Liebau v. Romeo Community Schools, 2013 WL 3942392 (Mich. Ct. App. 2013) (unpublished).

⁷ Kildahl v. School District of Fall Creek, et al., 2021 WL 4738238 (W.D.Wis.); Jensen v. Waukesha Board of Education et al., 2021 WL 4618709 (E.D.Wis.).

⁸ In general, the U.S. Constitution’s Fourteenth Amendment does not require state actors to take affirmative steps to protect individuals from harm. However, there are two exceptions to this rule: the state-created danger doctrine, which arises when a government official’s affirmative act created or increased the risk of harm to an individual or group and the official knew or should have known that those actions endangered the individual or group, and the special relationship exception, which arises when there is a special relationship between the state and an individual such as through incarceration or institutionalization. For further discussion of these exceptions, *see* Colleen Healy Boufides, *The Flint Water Crisis & Civil Litigation: A Closer Look at the State-Created Danger Doctrine*, Network for Public Health Law (July 19, 2016), <https://www.networkforphl.org/news-insights/the-flint-water-crisis-civil-litigation-a-closer-look-at-the-state-created-danger-doctrine/>. *See also* Colleen Healy Boufides, *Civil Litigation Arising from the Flint Water Crisis*, Network for Public Health Law (July 2016), <https://www.networkforphl.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Flint-Litigation-Summary-Table.pdf>.

⁹ *Brown v. Stone*, 378 So.2d 218, 223 (Miss. 1979). *See also* *Resurrection School v. Hertel*, 11 F.4th 437 (6th Cir. 2021) (holding that a Michigan Department of Health and Human Services order requiring masks for children in grades K-5 in all schools in Michigan did not violate the Free Exercise Clause or the Equal Protection Clause), *vacated and reh’g en banc granted* 16 F.4th 1215 (6th Cir. 2021).

¹⁰ MCL 408.1011(a).

¹¹ MCL 408.1035 et seq.

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- ¹² Mich. Dep't of Labor and Econ. Opportunity, *MIOSHA Encourages Employers to Follow Updated CDC Guidance to Contain the Spread of COVID-19* (Aug. 12, 2021), https://www.michigan.gov/leo/0,5863,7-336-94422_11407-565839--,00.html.
- ¹³ Ctrs. for Disease Control and Prevention, *Order, Requirement for Persons to Wear Masks While on Conveyances and at Transportation Hubs* (Jan. 29, 2021), https://www.cdc.gov/quarantine/pdf/Mask-Order-CDC_GMTF_01-29-21-p.pdf.
- ¹⁴ Ctrs. for Disease Control and Prevention, *Requirement for Face Masks on Public Transportation Conveyances and at Transportation Hubs* (Aug. 27, 2021), <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/face-masks-public-transportation.html#faq>.
- ¹⁵ Ctrs. for Disease Control and Prevention, *Order, Requirement for Persons to Wear Masks While on Conveyances and at Transportation Hubs* (Jan. 29, 2021), https://www.cdc.gov/quarantine/pdf/Mask-Order-CDC_GMTF_01-29-21-p.pdf.
- ¹⁶ 29 U.S.C. § 794; 34 C.F.R. § 104.33.
- ¹⁷ 42 U.S.C. § 12132.
- ¹⁸ See, e.g., *Arc of Iowa v. Reynolds*, 2021 WL 4166728 (S.D. Iowa Sept. 13, 2021); *Complaint, Disability Rights South Carolina v. McMaster*, 2021 WL 3747924 (D.S.C. Aug. 24, 2021), <https://www.aclu.org/legal-document/disability-rights-south-carolina-v-mcmaster-complaint>.
- ¹⁹ *Arc of Iowa v. Reynolds*, 2021 WL 4737902 (S.D. Iowa Oct. 8, 2021) (granting preliminary injunction); *Arc of Iowa v. Reynolds*, 2021 WL 4166728 (S.D. Iowa Sept. 13, 2021) (granting temporary restraining order).
- ²⁰ *Arc of Iowa v. Reynolds*, No. 21-3268 (8th Cir. Jan. 25, 2022) (finding that federal disability law requires mask wearing as a reasonable accommodation but narrowing the scope of the district court's preliminary injunction, noting that some schools in Iowa do not enroll students whose disabilities would require the school to make others wear masks). See also *Disability Rights South Carolina v. McMaster*, 2021 WL 4444841 (D.S.C. Sept. 28, 2021) (temporarily restraining and preliminarily enjoining enforcement of a provision which prohibited public schools from using appropriated or authorized funds to announce or enforce a mask mandate, finding that the provision violated Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act), *vacated in part on other grounds*, *Disability Rights South Carolina v. McMaster*, 2022 WL 214094 (4th Cir. Jan. 25, 2022) (remanded with instructions to dismiss the claim against the governor and attorney general for lack of standing). *But see* *E.T. v. Paxton*, 19 F.4th 760, 771 (5th Cir. 2021) (granting Attorney General Paxton's emergency motion for a stay pending appeal of a permanent injunction prohibiting him from enforcing the Texas governor's Executive Order GA-38, which prohibits local governmental entities from imposing mask mandates).
- ²¹ *G.S. by & through Schwaigert v. Lee*, No. 21-CV-02552-SHL-ATC, 2021 WL 4268285 (W.D. Tenn. Sept. 17, 2021); *R.K. by & through J.K. v. Lee*, No. 3:21-CV-00853, 2021 WL 5860924 (M.D. Tenn. Dec. 10, 2021).
- ²² MCL 380.10. See also *Troxel v. Granville*, 530 U.S. 57, 65-66 (2000) (recognizing parents' "fundamental right ... to make decisions concerning the care, custody, and control of their children" and "to direct the upbringing and education of children under their control") (internal citations omitted).
- ²³ *Liebau*, 2013 WL 3942392 at *6.
- ²⁴ *Prince v. Massachusetts*, 321 U.S. 158, 170 (1944).
- ²⁵ *Workman v. Mingo Cty. Bd. of Educ.*, 419 F. App'x 348 (4th Cir. 2011) (unpublished). See also *Zucht v. King*, 260 U.S. 174 (1922).
- ²⁶ *Blau v. Fort Thomas Pub. Sch. Dist.*, 401 F.3d 381, 395-96 (6th Cir. 2005) ("The critical point is this: While parents may have a fundamental right to decide *whether* to send their child to a public school, they do not have a fundamental right generally to direct *how* a public school teaches their child. Whether it is the school curriculum, the hours of the school day, school discipline, the timing and content of examinations, the individuals hired to teach at the school, the extracurricular activities offered at the school or, as here, a dress code, these issues of public education are generally committed to the control of state and local authorities.") (emphasis in original) (internal quotations omitted).
- ²⁷ See, e.g., *W.S. by Sonderman v. Ragsdale*, No. 1:21-CV-01560-TWT, 2021 WL 2024687, at *3 (N.D. Ga. May 12, 2021); *Oberheim v. Bason*, No. 4:21-CV-01566, 2021 WL 4478333, at *11 (M.D. Pa. Sept. 30, 2021); *Geerlings v. Tredyffrin/Easttown Sch. Dist.*, No. 21-CV-4024, 2021 WL 4399672, at *9 (E.D. Pa. Sept. 27, 2021).
- ²⁸ U.S. Dep't of Educ., *Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights Opens Investigations in Five States Regarding Prohibitions of Universal Indoor Masking* (Aug. 30, 2021), <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/departments-education-office-civil-rights-opens-investigations-five-states-regarding-prohibitions-universal-indoor-masking>.
- ²⁹ U.S. Dep't of Educ., *Letter from the Acting Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights to the Florida Commissioner of Education* (Sept. 10, 2021), <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/correspondence/other/20210910-florida-doe.pdf>.

³⁰ MCL 691.1407(2)(c).

³¹ MCL 691.1407(8)(a).

³² See, e.g., Wagenmaker & Oberly, *School Mask Mandates - In Illinois and Beyond* (Aug. 13, 2021) <https://wagenmakerlaw.com/blog/school-mask-mandates-illinois-and-beyond>.

³³ For further discussion on COVID-19 liability issues, see generally, James G. Hodge, Jennifer Piatt, & Leila Barraza, *Legal Interventions to Counter COVID-19 Denialism* (Aug. 25, 2021), https://papers.ssm.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3911198.

³⁴ Ctrs. for Disease Control and Prevention, *Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools* (updated Jan. 6, 2022), <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>.

³⁵ Mich. Dep't of Health and Hum. Servs. and Mich. Dep't of Ed., *MDHHS and MDE send letter to school superintendents; urges schools to take measures upon return from winter breaks* (Dec. 30, 2021), <https://www.michigan.gov/coronavirus/0,9753,7-406-98158-574711--,00.html>.

³⁶ Stephen Sawchuk, *Schools May Get Sued Over COVID-19. 7 Things to Know About Managing That Risk*, EducationWeek (Sept. 3, 2020), <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/schools-may-get-sued-over-covid-19-7-things-to-know-about-managing-that-risk/2020/09>.

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ MCL 333.2453(1).

³⁹ Mich. Admin. Code R. 325.175.

⁴⁰ MCL 333.2433, 333.2428, 333.1111.

⁴¹ People ex rel. Hill v. Bd. of Ed. of City of Lansing, 224 Mich. 388 (1923).

⁴² *W.S. by Sonderman v. Ragsdale*, No. 1:21-CV-01560-TWT, 2021 WL 2024687, at *3 (N.D. Ga. May 12, 2021) (“[A school district has] a right to rely on the recommendations given by reputable public health authorities, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Georgia Department of Public Health, when deciding how to combat COVID-19, which has caused the worst public health crisis in a century.”); *Oberheim v. Bason*, No. 4:21-CV-01566, 2021 WL 4478333, at *11 (M.D. Pa. Sept. 30, 2021) (holding that a school district has a right to rely on recommendations by reputable public health authorities and it is not in the best interest of the public to interfere with a health department’s masking order). See also *L.T. v. Zucker*, No. 121CV1034LEKDJS, 2021 WL 4775215, at *11 (N.D.N.Y. Oct. 13, 2021) (“State authorities must be allowed to rely on recommendations given by reputable public health authorities such as the CDC and WHO in the face of an ongoing pandemic”).

⁴³ Mich. Pub. Acts 87 § 250 (2021).

⁴⁴ Mich. Pub. Acts 87 § 1222(4) (2021).

⁴⁵ Ottawa County Corporation Counsel, *Corporation Counsel’s Statement Regarding State Appropriations Bill* (Oct. 1, 2021), <https://www.miottawa.org/Health/OCHD/pdf/Counsel-Statement-SB82.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Governor Whitmer Letter to Michigan Legislature (Sept. 29, 2021), https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIEOG/2021/09/29/file_attachments/1952005/Transmittal%20Letter%2009292021.pdf.