



## Hidalgo County Commissioners Court

**Richard F. Cortez**  
*County Judge*

**David L. Fuentes**  
*Commissioner, Precinct 1*

**Eduardo "Eddie" Cantu**  
*Commissioner, Precinct 2*

**Everardo "Ever" Villarreal**  
*Commissioner, Precinct 3*

**Ellie Torres**  
*Commissioner, Precinct 4*

## OFFICE OF COUNTY JUDGE RICHARD F. CORTEZ

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## NEWS RELEASE

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, October 14, 2021

## Hidalgo County Health Authority extends mask mandate in schools

**EDINBURG** – Hidalgo County Health Authority Dr. Ivan Melendez has extended a mandatory mask mandate for all area public and private schools after consulting with the superintendents of local school districts and the medical community.

"Based on all the information I have gathered, including polling 135 doctors and many area superintendents, 100 percent of those polled want the mandate to continue," Dr. Melendez said during an hour-long meeting on Wednesday with area superintendents. "The mandate should be continued until vaccines are available to everyone," he said.

The mandate was initially ordered by Dr. Melendez in his capacity as Health Authority on August 13 as area schools began preparing for a new school year. The mandate includes the option for individual school boards to vote to opt out of a mandate.

During Wednesday's meeting, area superintendents expressed overwhelming support for continuing the mask mandate, saying that the rate of infection in their districts was far lower than originally feared and they attributed that, in part, to the use of facial coverings. Area doctors also agreed that the masks were having a positive effect.

Dr. Melendez said that he is encouraged by the downward trend of the number of cases. But COVID infections remain the number one health problem for school aged children in the county. He believes that facial coverings played a significant role in keeping the numbers from being far worse. As of Thursday, a total of 3,704 students and staff had tested positive for COVID-19 since the mask mandate was initiated. These numbers reflect several staff deaths due to COVID, according to area superintendents.

Hidalgo County Judge Richard F. Cortez said he agreed with the decision, particularly because the order gives schools the flexibility to opt out of the mandate at any time. "While the number of infections among students and staff appear to be slowing, I urge caution not only among our schools, but the community at large," Judge Cortez said. "This order gives area schools the flexibility they need to exercise caution, while giving them the option to opt out of the mandate at any time of their choosing."

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*Hidalgo County is home to one of the fastest growing regions in the nation. We provide health and justice to the over 800,000 residents of our county. We strive to be accessible and responsive to our citizens by providing excellent public service through the values of leadership, transparency, fairness, collaboration, respect and fiscal responsibility. Follow our social media feed at [www.co.hidalgo.tx.us/followus](http://www.co.hidalgo.tx.us/followus)*