

TECHNOLOGY

WITH MASKS, ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

LIC-BASED MARRS MAKERS FOCUSES ON MASKS FIT FOR CHILDREN

BY JULIE MOLINE

Young children are finally getting vaccinated, yet the pandemic threat prevails and, with that, face masks are still required in most school districts around the country. Although mask wearing has been practiced for nearly two years, there's been scant attention on ensuring children's masks fit well enough to be comfortable, functional and practical.

Marrs Makers, a Long Island City-based fashion and leather goods brand, is determined to address that problem.

"Masks marketed for children—even if labeled 'child'—don't

reflect the vast difference in size between a kindergartener and a pre-teen," said Amy Sheets, founder of Marrs Makers. "Mask manufacturers realize this, but there are no specific standards for determining sizes and materials for children, who have breathing capacity that's different than adults and who might have special needs."

"Just because a face mask or N95 respirator is smaller doesn't mean it's suitable to be worn throughout the school day," she added. "So kids, particularly those 12 years and younger, are often left with masks that are too hot, too tight, too loose or simply uncomfortable



and ineffective."

Together with Pedro Chavez, head of Queens-based Tratado LLC, a hardware and software technology company serving the apparel industry, Marrs Makers launched an initiative called Masks Fit for Kids in spring 2021.

With the assistance of the Queens Chamber of Commerce and a grant from the PPE Assistance Fund administered by ITAC, the New York City center for the New York Manufacturing Extension Partnership, the company designed and implemented a pilot study at an elementary/middle school in Jackson Heights.

Over three days, and in close coordination with the principal and school staff, it conducted facial measurements of over 100 students ranging in age from Pre-K through 8th grade.

"Queens has been an ideal test

site for this measurement project because of its demographic and ethnic diversity, including groups hit hard by the pandemic," Chavez said. "We're grateful for the Chamber of Commerce's ability to introduce us to the right resources that allowed us to get traction from the start, and then—once the pilot was concluded—to be able to meet with leaders in government and manufacturing to determine what can be done collaboratively."

Those metrics were used to produce washable cotton masks, smaller versions of Marrs Makers masks produced early in the pandemic for the US military and first responders. Local seamstresses laid off during the pandemic did the sewing.

"Design and production were a hyper-local Queens effort, and this pilot program confirmed what we now see as a critical need," Sheets



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said.

The project's next goals involve expanding this research through a broader anthropometric measurement survey of city school children.

After collecting the data, Marrs Makers will analyze results and suggest protocols to guide manufacturers of masks and other types of PPE for youth, an effort that will improve design, production and procurement of safety-related products for children.

Sheets and Chavez continue to work with the Queens Chamber of Commerce to maximize public and private resources, with the goal being to sustain local research and improve services to New York City's schools, businesses, workforce, and health and social services responding to the COVID-19 emergency.

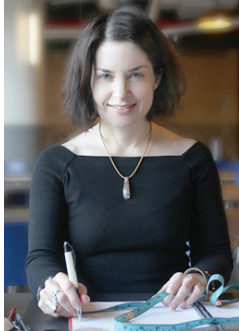
After working with the govern-

ment and manufacturing industry to establish mask design guidelines, Marrs Makers will offer training, both virtual and in-person, to teach students and faculty proper mask selection.

Training programs will also be available for local garment manufacturers, identifying ways to incorporate different sizes to match demand.

"Besides creating new business opportunities for local fabricators, it would create a more resilient supply chain," Chavez said. "That's vital not just for the current pandemic, but to be prepared for future health emergencies."

"Mask measures in schools should eventually disappear," added Sheets. "Still, parents now see the benefit of using face coverings to keep their kids safe—from COVID variants, bad colds or the flu—and we know that a properly fitting mask is an essential way to do that."



Julie Moline is a freelance writer who's written extensively on the garment industry.



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