

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Memorial Room
September 20, 2021**

6:30 p.m. – Non-Public Session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II (a) (b) (c)

- Staff Welfare

Present: Chair Guagliumi, Vice Chair Rothhaus, Board Member Barnes, Board Member Hardy, and Board Member Peters. Also present were Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Yarlott, Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen, and Kaitlyn Vadney, Student Representative.

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Guagliumi called the meeting to order at approximately 7:00 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chair Guagliumi pointed out that the School Board would accept public comment via email and to do that members of the public could send emails to publiccomment@sau26.org.

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

State Representative Jeanine Notter, 19 Whittier Road, addressed the Board and expressed support of the parents who were opposed to face coverings and divisive concepts.

Board Member Barnes read aloud an email as summarized below:

Ms. Kate Gagnon, 6 Glenwood Lane

The wonderful book called “The Death of Expertise” – an overly simplified summary is that it outlines our society’s strain from trusted experts in their respective fields. It details how people believe they can find information just a click away that overrules a field expert’s years of knowledge. I’m not writing to share my stance on masks or vaccines because mine is irrelevant. What I am asking is that you defer to the experts. We are privileged to live in close proximity to some of the top hospitals in not just the country, but the world. Boston Children’s Hospital is currently ranked #1 in the nation, Massachusetts General is ranked 5th, and right here in New Hampshire, we have CHaD. Let those voices, the top medical experts be the ones that guide your decisions. In addition to the medical experts, I would encourage you to survey teachers and staff in the District to gain their input on having children masked or not. Our family has had the pleasure of attending three of Merrimack’s schools. At each school, we have been truly blessed by the education and support provided by each of its teachers and staff. We have seen firsthand the level of commitment and the heart they bring to work each day. I thank all of the district employees for their Herculean efforts during these abundantly strange times. Their voices should be heard and weighed in the decision-making process. After all, they are the heroes showing up to educate our children.

Ms. Shayna Debork, 89 Belmont Street, addressed the Board, said she did not feel that the Board had the authority to force a medical device on her child, and the decision to wear a mask should be left to the parents.

Ms. Debork stated she was not aware that the Merrimack School District had contracted with 2Revolutions. She asked for a more clear and simplistic explanation as to what their purpose was. She said she felt the company had an extreme ideology whose sole objective was to make the children into “change agents.” Ms. Debork said she felt the contract with 2Revolutions should be terminated.

Board Member Barnes read aloud an email as summarized below:

Mr. Matt Clement, 65 Patten Road

I would like this entered into the meeting minutes. I will not be attending the meeting because I do not want to be in a confined room indoors with people not wearing masks. We should be following the CDC guidelines and listening to the professionals. I have watched most of the School Board meetings and must admit that I am shocked that you have people on the School Board that sit there without MASKS (you know who you are and a lot of voters are watching). This is clearly a political statement and one that I know many people will not forget when it comes time to vote you out of office. I see the anti-mask people coming to the meetings and making a complete circus of the process and a few Board Members cave to the loud minority. If you ask at the beginning of the meeting that everyone wear masks and they don't, THEN ASK THEM TO LEAVE! There has been ample time to simply send out a survey to poll the district parents about whether they want masks or not, yet you have chosen NOT to do that because you want to circumvent the choice of the parents in the district for your own political bias. Had you taken a poll (after the numbers for Delta started to rise), you would overwhelmingly see that parents and faculty want to wear masks and not allow people to opt-out and spread the virus. Stop ignoring the scientific research and do what should be done to protect our students before we can no longer say 0 students have died in NH. It's not a matter of IF, but WHEN. When that day does come, let's not let it be a Merrimack student or faculty.

From the CDC website:

0-17yr old deaths involving COVID in the US is 439.

0-17yr old deaths involving COVID in FL is 33.

0-17yr old deaths involving COVID in TX is 62.

0-17yr old deaths involving COVID in CA is 41.

0-17yr old deaths involving COVID in GA is 20.

These schools have been in session longer than New Hampshire so the numbers are higher, but it's very naive to think that NH is somehow invincible and it can't/won't happen here too. I encourage you to read the article here for some interesting and relevant information on masks and children. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/face-masks-and-kids-separating-fact-from-fiction/2021/08>

I want to also say that because you have decided to allow parents to opt their kids out and allowing potential spreaders into the classroom with other kids who have opted to wear masks, you should provide numbers to parents on a class by class basis so that parents can make an informed decision to pull their kids out of school if the risk is just too great. My child could be in a class with 90% of the kids opting out and spreading the virus to everyone in the room and I wouldn't even have that information with the exception of asking my kid to "SPY" on other kids for us so that we can make an ADULT

decision. Why is it so hard to be transparent and give us the information? I'm not asking for names or any personal information just a number of students that will NOT be wearing a mask in my child's classroom, I get almost daily emails from the school for various pieces of information so it is not because you do not have the ability to communicate with parents, but that you chose not to do the right thing.

Ms. Michelle Carcatos, 25 Swift Lane, addressed the Board and said she felt masks were psychological stresses for children and were destructive to learning and communicating in classrooms. Ms. Carcatos also said she did not agree with the district's hiring of 2Revolutions and felt Critical Race Theory was illegal in the State of New Hampshire.

Board Member Barnes read aloud an email as summarized below:

Ms. Ashleigh Lowe, 2 W. Chamberlain Road

I have been watching the meetings on TV and do not currently feel comfortable coming to the meetings in person. From what I have seen the room where the meetings are held is rather small, and it had lately become very crowded with the vast majority of those in attendance not wearing masks. I feel this is not a safe environment to put myself in during a pandemic that seems to be gaining steam rather than slowing down. I also have fears about my personal safety as my opinion will be different from that of most of the people in attendance and the behavior of some residents give me pause to attend in person.

I write to encourage the Board to rethink the current policy on making masks mandatory for everyone in a School District. The entirety of the preschool through elementary school population is not yet age-eligible for a vaccine. In recent weeks, pediatric cases have been steadily climbing, as well as hospitalizations and PICU admissions among children who have been diagnosed with COVID-19. I feel that the very least we can

do to help protect our children, who are largely unprotected without access to vaccines, is to have them wear a mask while inside district buildings as well as on buses to and from school. Masking is a simple and easy way to offer them at least some protection. My son has autism, has an IEP, and attends Merrimack High School. Wearing a mask is extremely challenging for him because he has fairly severe sensory issues. I send him with a mask every day because I feel it is the right thing to do. He is doing his part, (even with his disability) and we, as a family, are doing our part to help protect others and control the spread of the virus.

Please note that this pandemic looked vastly different in May when the district asked parents to make choices about their students return to school. We were asked when case numbers were low and the district was offering mitigation strategies for COVID-19 with distancing and masks. A couple of months later the reopening plan was announced. It stated that even though state agencies recommended students and staff be masked while in buildings, masks would be optional. A motion was made to make masks mandatory but the district offered parents an "opt-out", essentially making masks optional. It wasn't a policy it was a cop-out. Around the same time, any truly district-supported, robust remote options for the majority of the students were taken away. Special education aside, where there seems to be much more flexibility for those who are on an IEP to access their curriculum remotely, the vast majority of students lost the full remote option. The Delta variant has driven case counts up, and it has caused an exponential spike in cases among children. Vaccines help to prevent severe illness and death. Our youngest student population can not yet reap the benefit of

those vaccines. Their parents, as well as the parents of vaccinated children with compromised immune systems or those who have family members who are more at risk for severe disease, had to make an impossible choice when those robust, remote options were taken away. The Delta variant changes things and it is a very different landscape than it was in May.

I ask the Board to please consider making masking mandatory for everyone while in a district building and while using district contracted transportation services to and from school. I also ask the Board to please strongly consider offering a remote option like parents had access to for the 2020-2021 school year. Asking parents to send their children into an unsafe school building OR have to homeschool their children because the remote options are no longer available just is not right. Masks will offer an inexpensive layer of protection that would make parents feel a little bit better about the choice to send their child into a building to access their education.

There is no substitute for in person education. It is the best choice for everyone when it can be delivered safely for all involved. The last thing I want to see is for cases to spread quickly again and for the district to have to go back to remote for any amount of time. My son deserves better than that. He was remote from March of 2020 until June 28, 2021. Never did I ever think that my son, with a significant intellectual disability, would not enter a school building for more than a calendar year, more than an entire school year. He got through it, his team was nothing short of superheroes, but he deserves better. He has the right to access his curriculum in an appropriate and safe environment. Masks will help make both of those qualifications a reality.

Mr. Bill Phingston, 17 Jessica Drive, addressed the Board and thanked them for listening. He said he considered the gym a classroom and noted his child could opt-out of wearing a mask during music class unless he/she was singing. He also said there was verbiage added to the opt-out option and requested clarification. Mr. Phingston also said he did not agree with the district's contract with 2Revolutions.

Board Member Barnes read aloud an email as summarized below:

Ms. Naomi Schoenfeld, 10 Independence Drive

Please be aware that those attending tonight's meeting in person do not necessarily represent the broader voices of the Merrimack community. Rather, they represent those who are comfortable attending an unmasked indoor gathering, in a manner that is counter to the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) published guidance that masks be worn in indoor groups by all individuals, whether vaccinated or not, in places at or above specific levels of community transmission.

Similarly, I urge you to take any unilateral petitions or demands made by small groups of Merrimack residents in their proper context. While they may provide valuable insight into the beliefs and desires of that sub-group, they do not represent Merrimack as a whole — and should not be treated as if they do.

Lastly, I would like to voice support for the district's consideration of a 2Revolutions strategic planning initiative, recently posted to the School District Facebook page. Whether this specific vendor or some other approach is ultimately chosen for our district after public and district-level evaluation, it is wonderful to see competency-based and student-centered approaches

being considered by our schools.

Ms. Natalie Reyes-Silverman, London Court, addressed the Board and said she heard that whether or not students were wearing masks depended upon the individual teacher's feelings who were policing the use of masks.

Ms. Reyes-Silverman also stated she was not in favor of hiring 2Revolutions and said she was a Hispanic American and never felt to be the subject of systematic racism.

Board Member Barnes read aloud an email as summarized below:

Ms. Kim Elliott, 78 Jessica Drive

I would like to attend tonight's meeting. I'm choosing to provide comments through this email after watching the last couple of meetings and seeing people in a small contained space without masks. Thank you for allowing this option, so that other voices may be heard.

This is my 24th year teaching in Nashua, and my 13th year as a parent in the Merrimack School District. I have been attending School Board meetings since the 90's. Sometimes, the only people in attendance are the people who are presenting something that night. Perhaps we have the pandemic to thank for the increased involvement in our system. However, right now, the optics look very skewed. The people who are choosing to come in person are not representative of all the stakeholders in Merrimack. Please know that

many families support the health and safety decisions the Board has made; even if we aren't there to fill the room.

I provided some local numbers to show the difference between these district-based decisions. On September 14th, the Superintendent of the Nashua School District released the weekly numbers for positive Covid cases within the entire district. Nashua has 17 schools and over 10,000 students. Over a four-day time period, there were 10 new cases reported. In comparison, Bedford High School (just the high school, not the district) reported 21 new active cases during that same time period. Nashua is mask mandated. Bedford is mask optional (with very few kids wearing them).

Regarding curriculum decisions, I know the proposed new curriculum goes through extensive analysis, possible pilot programs, and committee review. Curriculum was never flashy. It never drew large numbers of people to School Board meetings in the past. I've watched Nashua Board of Education meetings draw groups of protesters, even when nothing curricular was on the agenda. I hope that does not happen in Merrimack. If it does, I ask that all Board Members stick to the process, and evaluate materials/programs as you always have done.

Thank you for your commitment to our community. Thank you for maintaining order during public comment. From home, it is noticed that you are all remaining objective and professional.

Ms. Lindsey Thibeault, 19 Pleasant Street, addressed the Board and said it was becoming clear that no matter how much data was presented by either side there would never be a definitive answer and there were multiple different opinions. She said she felt people should be able to make health-related decisions for themselves, including herself, and her children.

Additionally, Ms. Thibeault commented that she did not think the educational focus should not be under the guise of transformation as 2Revolutions solicited.

Board Member Barnes read aloud an email as summarized below:

Mr. Robert Reisman, 8 Iris Drive

I am emailing to advocate that Merrimack adopt a masking policy that is similar to that of Hudson, NH. In brief, the policy is informed by the number of cases in the town where numerical thresholds set each option. I believe that masks are mandatory if there are over 50 cases in the town, for example. Also, there is universal masking below the age of 12, as these kids cannot be vaccinated. Individual students may be opted out based on Individual Education Plans (IEP) and doctor's notes. With pediatric Covid cases rising and no vaccine yet for kids under 12, this makes sense at the moment. I also wish to vocalize support for the use of 2Revolutions as a tool for moving toward equitable and learner-centered schools and systems.

Ms. Sabrina Bebe, 81 Wire Road, asked if it was still in the Board's purview to allow the district to go remote because they were no longer under a government order state of emergency. Chair Guagliumi replied to her knowledge the Board could not allow the district to go remote. Ms. Bebe also said she was not in favor of using 2Revolutions. She said she did not believe systemic racism happened in New Hampshire.

Board Member Barnes read aloud an email as summarized below:

Ms. Sara Hartwell, 49 Joppa Road

I believe in a time of a health crisis so large it's categorized as a pandemic; we should be listening to the doctors and scientists. Those doctors and scientists "in charge" recommend masks in conditions like we are in now, especially for the unvaccinated. I truly feel that, until kids are eligible to be vaccinated, they should be protected. To protect all, but especially the involuntarily unvaccinated, masks are worn at all times in the building.

Mr. Tom Gibson, 25 Packard Drive, addressed the Board and asked if the only emails that the Board received were pro masks. Board Member Barnes replied she was reading all of the emails that were sent to publiccomment@sau26.org and there were no more to be read until the end of the meeting.

Ms. Heather Callahan, 5 King Henry Court, addressed the Board and read aloud the following statement which had 100 signatures as summarized as follows:

As of October 1, 2021, we, the undersigned, will not comply with the mask mandate in our Merrimack Schools. Masks have not proven to be effective at reducing transmission of COVID-19 in school settings. A mask mandate infringes on our parental autonomy to make medical decisions for our own children.

Merrimack's current mask policy violates safety guidelines put forth by the World Health Organization in that "Children aged 5 years and under should not be required to wear masks. There may be local requirements for children aged 5 years and under to wear masks or specific needs in some settings, such as being physically close to someone who is ill. In these circumstances, if the child wears a mask, a parent or other guardian should be within direct

line of sight to supervise the safe use of the mask.” “Children should not wear a mask when playing sports or doing physical activities as not to compromise their children.”

We expressly prohibit any employees or associates of the Merrimack School District from coercing or encouraging our children to wear a mask. We support the right of the parents to decide.

Ms. Jennifer Greenwood, Dahl Road, addressed the Board and stated she felt choices to make medical decisions were still being taken away. She said while there was an opt-out option for students to wear masks they still had to wear masks in school buildings at certain times. Ms. Greenwood also said she had multiple questions regarding surveys and asked who she could speak with to obtain answers.

Ms. Alyssa Smokler, 26 Beacon Drive, addressed the Board and said she felt the choice to mask the students should be up to the parents. She also said she was strongly against the CRT (Critical Race Theory) program and would pull her child from the district if that were to come to fruition.

Ms. Naomi Holter, 10 Everest Drive, addressed the Board and said she liked the fact that there was a compromise when it came to the use of masks; although she said her personal preference was for all students to wear masks.

Ms. Shannon Rand, 1 Blair Road, addressed the Board and stated she felt the use of masks should be left up to the parents. She also said she was not in favor of hiring 2Revolutions.

Emma, a student at Merrimack High School, said she refused to wear a mask despite what the School Board thought or imposed.

Mr. Mark Fazio, 9 Whitewood Lane, stated he had concerns regarding the selection of 2Revolutions as a consulting group and strategic planning advisor. He said he was unable to find anything that discussed any improvements they had delivered to other districts.

Board Member Barnes read aloud an email as summarized below:

Ms. Brittany Damon, Turnbuckle Lane

I wish only to go on record against masks in our schools. I will say only that it is a decision that should be made by parents and parents only. As far as 2Revolutions, again it seems as though many have already stated their opinions on this. I cannot express my disgust with this organization. When the people who are the instructional disruptors I do not see a bright future with these people. The proponents of this group state well, it hasn't started yet so let's see. My defense to that is that it has started. According to the email we received from Bill, we are already in a partnership with 2Revolutions and they will be involved in helping to select the next Superintendent. This is one of the most troubling parts. They state that they believe in the staff being diverse as well. I am surprised that the teachers are on board with this knowing that they want teachers to look very different than most of those that we have.

As said earlier, you can opt-out with a 30-day notice as two other districts have already done in New Hampshire. Hopefully, Merrimack will do the right thing and think of our children, and if not, I know a lot of parents that will seek alternative ways of education, me being one of them.

Ms. Cheryl Davillis, Cota Road, addressed the Board and said she was very concerned about the use of masks because the Delta variant was so much more contagious. She also stated she was in favor of educating students about the history of systemic racism.

Mr. A.J. Gutierrez, 10 Danbury Drive, addressed the Board and said masking students should be up to the parents.

Ms. Kathy Komar, Belmont Drive, addressed the Board and stated per the Centers of Disease Control (CDC), there was no evidence that showed masks were effective against COVID-19. She said she felt it should be up to the parents whether or not their children wore a mask.

Ms. Lila York, 46 Belmont Drive, addressed the Board and said she believed the use of masks should be left up to the parents.

Ms. Tiffany Castelluci, Baboosic Lake Road, addressed the Board and said it was never her intent to say anything to anyone on Board that was hurtful. She said forcing children to wear a mask was taking away their rights and felt it should be up to the parents to decide if their children wear a mask.

Ms. Castelluci said a Special Meeting of the School Board was being requested and noted the members each received a copy of the petition. She said the meeting would be to:

- To see if the voter's of the Merrimack SAU 26 School District will vote to adopt the following provisions pertaining to requirements to wear face coverings within the Merrimack SAU 26 School District.
 - The use of face coverings shall be optional on school property for all students at all times at the sole discretion of their parent or guardian.
 - The use of face coverings shall be optional at all times for any employees and visitors on School District facilities and attending school-sanctioned events.
 - The use of face coverings shall be optional at all times on school property for all students at the sole discretion of their parent or guardian during sports practices and events.

Ms. Castelluci said 148 people had already signed the petition.

Ms. Castelluci asked about other precautions that were supposed to be taken along with wearing masks. She also said she did not feel Critical Race Theory should be taught in the Merrimack School District.

Mr. Mike Drouin, 5 Vanderbilt Drive, suggested they focus more on the \$80 million school budget. He pointed out there were multiple open volunteer positions to serve on Boards and Committees in the town.

Ms. Jeanine Notter, 19 Whittier Road, said she received a message stating that \$76,000 had been spent for the Merrimack School District to enter into a contract with 2Revolutions.

3. RECOGNITIONS

There were no recognitions.

4. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

a. Superintendent Update

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the Thorntons Ferry Elementary School was being recognized by the American Heart Association as a “Heart of Gold Top School” in New Hampshire based on their dedication and mission of the health and well-being of the students.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen congratulated Mr. Kevin Freeman, Custodian at the

Merrimack High School for recognition the previous week on New Hampshire Chronicle regarding his positive attitude and the positive impact he had on students. He added the Merrimack High School football team won the game with Nashua South the previous weekend with a final score of 28 – 26.

b. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Yarlott stated she would provide updates at the next School Board meeting.

c. Assistant Superintendent for Business Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell shared that the operating budget for 2022 – 2023 would be coming up and one of the major portions included in all of the operating budgets was benefits. He said the district would be provided with the guaranteed maximum rate soon and he would announce that number at the next meeting.

d. School Board Update

Chair Guagliumi stated the Board received a petition for a Special Meeting regarding masks optional everywhere on school property at all times for students, staff, and visitors. She said the petition had been sent to legal counsel and she would keep the public posted.

e. Student Representative Update

Student Representative Vadney said she had no updates to share.

5. OLD BUSINESS

a. Health & Safety Task Force Update

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the School Board passed a revised mask policy on August 23, 2021, which indicated that all students would not have to wear masks in the classrooms but would have to wear masks everywhere else (hallways, etc.) in the building. He said it was agreed that the policy would be re-evaluated on a monthly basis. He said he met with

the Health & Safety Task Force, the leadership team, and listened to the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services presentation on September 15, 2021, whose recommendation was that everyone; staff & students wear masks indoors at all times. He said, however, that his recommendation was to continue with the current policy. He also pointed out that there was an increase in positive COVID cases and an increase in students and staff who had to quarantine.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen reminded everyone it was his job to keep the students in school and fully understood how awful the previous year was due to COVID. He recommended to continue with the current mask policy and felt it was currently the best compromise possible.

Board Member Barnes asked what the expectations were for quarantining and who would be asked to quarantine and when. Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied the recommendation was that those who were in close contact with people with COVID, particularly in the same household, and were unvaccinated quarantine for 14-days with a test 3 – 5 days into the quarantine.

Board Member Barnes asked if the School District had a record of who was vaccinated. Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied they did not ask people what their vaccination status was, noting they used an honor system.

Board Member Barnes asked if they should really be operating with the thought that everyone was not vaccinated (between the ages of 12 to 18) because statistics indicated they probably were not. Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said two-thirds of eligible children in Merrimack were not vaccinated.

Board Member Hardy asked what defined a close contact. Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied a close contact was defined as a student who was exposed to another student who was within 3 to 6 feet for more than 15 minutes or within a 24-hour period of time masked or unmasked. He added the nursing staff was very careful about who was masked and not masked in terms of the likelihood of a child being exposed.

Chair Guagliumi asked Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen to review the positivity numbers of COVID for the past month. Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied the number (per 100,000 people) was 162 with a test positivity rate of 8.80% on August 12, 2021; on August 23, 2021, the number was 195 with a test positivity rate of 7.30%; on August 31, 2021, the number was 355 with a test positivity rate of 11.6%; on September 2, 2021; the number 302 with a test positivity rate of 7.40%; and on September 16, 2021, the number of cases was 310 with a test positivity rate 6.60%. He said the above data, according to the Department of Public Health matrix, put Merrimack in the category of substantial transmission which recommended universal masking.

Chair Guagliumi asked if there were any evidence that COVID was being spread within the School District. Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied it was difficult to determine if the positive cases were due to children being in school or whether it was coming from the outside.

Board Member Peters said she felt it was important to clarify the mask policy with all of the teachers so there was consistency across the board.

Board Member Barnes commented she felt when addressing quarantining they should do so with the assumption that the students were not vaccinated.

MOTION: Board Member Barnes made a motion to instruct the administration to have a quarantining practice with the assumption that any student in close proximity to an active COVID case is assumed to be unvaccinated. Chair Guagliumi seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen clarified that quarantining only applied to those students who were within close contact with a person who tested positive for COVID within the community or within their household. He said, otherwise, in the community or in a household where a child might be fully vaccinated, they should self-assess for symptoms.

Board Member Peters said she did not feel that students who were vaccinated should be forced to quarantine simply because the other two-thirds had not been vaccinated.

Board Member Hardy said she did not want to assume everyone was not vaccinated because if a child was in close contact with a person who tested positive for COVID that parent could (if they so choose) produce a vaccination card and they would then not need to quarantine.

Board Member Barnes explained the reason behind her motion was that she was not aware that the district was giving parents an opportunity to produce a vaccination card. She asked Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen for clarification. Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied he would have to check with the nursing staff.

Board Member Hardy commented that the parent could offer proof of vaccination and that would not violate HIPPA laws.

Board Member Barnes withdrew her motion but stated she felt there needed to be clarification. Chair Guagliumi also withdrew her motion and noted administration needed to provide clarification.

MOTION: Board Member Hardy made a motion to continue the current mask policy for one month and to be re-evaluated prior to the month of November. Vice Chair Rothhaus seconded the motion.

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.

b. Update to the Use of Masks by Students and Staff Policy (EBCVM)

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen noted on September 23, 2021, the School Board approved a mask policy that was different from the one originally approved on August 19, 2020. He said he checked with Attorney Kathy Peahl, who suggested that the original policy be rescinded since the later policy was substantially different.

Chair Guagliumi pointed out the policies usually had three readings but that under emergency situations the Board could waive that protocol. She said she wanted to treat the policy as a first reading, the second reading would be placed on the next meeting's agenda, and then on the Consent Agenda at the following meeting.

Board Member Hardy read the proposed use of masks by students and staff policy into the record.

USE OF MASKS BY STUDENTS AND STAFF POLICY

Masks will be worn by students, staff, visitors, and volunteers within the school building with the following exception:

At the written request of a parent or legal guardian, a child may opt-out of wearing a mask only while in a classroom. Please note that this opt-out applies only to students. All staff are expected to be masked while indoors when students and/or other adults are in their presence.

Masks do not have to be worn when students, staff members, or volunteers are outside, at lunch, snack time, or during mask breaks that are held outside.

Masks will be worn while on a van or school bus.

Except as stated above, masks will be required in the school buildings at all other times, including transition time.

Masks will be worn by athletes who participate in indoor sports.

No person, including a student, shall be required to wear a mask if their disability or a medical condition prevents them from doing such. In such cases, documentation of the disability or medical condition will be required, and in such cases, alternative precautions will be sought in order to achieve the same or similar safety benefits.

Staff (including contracted service providers) who work with students who are deaf or hearing impaired, students learning to read, and students who rely on lip-reading shall wear clear masks or visors/clear face shields which enhance service provision.

*Mask decision will be revisited and possibly modified on a monthly basis, based on local COVID data.

Duration

This policy will be enforced as of September 1, 2021. It will be reviewed on a monthly basis upon analysis of Merrimack COVID data in relation to the NHDHHS (New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services) Matrix and criteria on levels of community transmissions. Outbreaks or multiple clusters within a school/school district, as defined by NHDHHS or a change in the NHDHHS-defined level of community transmission for Merrimack may result in a change to this policy.

Legal References were also read aloud and can be found on the Merrimack School Districts website.

Board Member Peters stated she was concerned about athletes who participated in indoor sports who had to wear masks. She suggested a compromise might be that when the athletes were benched or on the sidelines, they did not have to wear a mask but when on the "court" they would not have to wear a mask. Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied the NHIAA had not taken a position on the subject and said the collective interest was what was best for the students. Board Member Hardy suggested that the sentence "**Mask decision will be revisited and possibly modified on a monthly basis, based on local COVID data" be removed because it was covered under the subject of "Duration."

Vice Chair Rothhaus commented that she felt the line that stated “Masks will be worn by athletes who participate in indoor sports” should be removed.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated he would draft another copy of the policy to include the Board’s suggestions and send it to them prior to the next meeting.

Board Member Peters commented it had come to her attention that some doctors were not providing a note of exemption for some children who had asthma. Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied he would speak to the leadership team and nurses regarding that issue.

Board Member Barnes agreed that the sentence “*Mask decision will be revisited and possibly modified on a monthly basis, based on local COVID data” should be removed.

Board Member Hardy stated all spectators of sporting events would have to adhere to the “all visitor’s to wear masks policy.” Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied that was his assumption.

Board Member Peters suggested the sentence “It will be reviewed on a monthly basis upon analysis of Merrimack COVID date...” be changed to “It will be reviewed **and possibly modified** on a monthly basis upon analysis of Merrimack COVID date...”

6. NEW BUSINESS

a. Surplus from 2020 – 2021 Operating Budget to Reduce 2021 – 2022 Tax Rate

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated the previous year’s surplus was approximately \$4.7 million that went towards the reduction of the tax rate. He said the school rate for taxes went down by .35 cents.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said the current year’s surplus (2021) was \$8.163 million. He said the school portion of the tax rate would also go down.

b. Lunch Program Update 2021 – 2022 School Year

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said the prior year the revenue for the Food Services Department had taken a drastic hit due to COVID. He said all of the students were currently back to school and the revenue had gone up. He reminded people to please fill out applications for the free and reduced lunch program and added some of the grant-funded operations were based upon the number of people enrolled in that program.

c. Other

Chair Guagliumi asked if there was any other new business the members would like to bring before the Board. There was none.

7. APPROVAL REQUESTS

a. September 7, 2021 Minutes

Edits:

Page 3, line 136 – “Handwriting without Tiers” was changed to “Handwriting without Tears” – Board Member Peters

Board Member Barnes questioned the numbering order.

Page 4, line #158 - #161 – Requested that the paragraph be split into two separate thoughts. – Chair Guagliumi

Page 8 – under “Correspondence” – Requested that the correspondence section have more detail. – Chair Guagliumi

MOTION: Board Member Barnes made a motion to rescind her motion to approve the minutes from the September 7, 2021, meeting. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.

MOTION: Board Member Barnes made a motion to table the approval of the September 7, 2021, meeting to seek clarification of the numbering order. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.

8. CONSENT AGENDA

a. Administrator Resignation

- Ms. Nancy Rose, Director of Technology and Library Media Services

Comments

Board Member Barnes commented the memorandum dated September 3rd included in the Board’s package stated: “I believe we should require students who have opted out to wear a mask at all times in our schools indoors if they have been identified as a close contact of a family member in the home who has tested positive for COVID-19. It is my recommendation that also applies to a student who has been identified as a close contact with someone in the community who has tested positive.” She asked why those students were not being asked to quarantine and also stated she felt it was very important to vet that issue. Chair Guagliumi said she would make sure the discussion was added to the next meeting’s agenda.

MOTION: Board Member Barnes made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.

b. Educator Nominations

There were none.

9. OTHER

a. Committee Reports

Chair Guagliumi stated she and Board Member Hardy had a call with the Superintendent Search Firm who would begin the process in the spring. She said they discussed the timeline and the firm would be reaching out to the Director of Human Resources and would coordinate with administration. She said she would keep the community and the Board updated.

Board Member Hardy added that there would be significant community involvement in gathering feedback regarding what qualities were being looked for in a new Superintendent.

Board Member Barnes stated she attended the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting on September 15th where they discussed annual park reviews which included O’Gara Drive and the fields at Reeds Ferry. She added they also discussed what improvements were needed at the skate park and the basketball court at the end of O’Gara Drive.

Board Member Barnes noted the following:

- The Dog Park Subcommittee was looking for new members.
- Dog Park was looking for donations of “poop bags” and money for mulch.
- Blood Drive on Friday, September 24th.
- Merrimack 275th Celebration on Saturday, October 30th.
- Halloween Event on Saturday, October 30th from 2:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. (fireworks display)
- Student Representative opening on the Committee.

b. Correspondence

Chair Guagliumi said she and the entire School Board had received some emails relating to:

- Would like students to wear masks in school and/or concern for health regarding not wearing masks.
- Would like no mask and would like kids to opt-out of optional masks.
- Thank you for reinstating public comment.
- Thank you to the School Board for their service and for adding a teacher at James Masticola Upper Elementary School.
- Expressed concern regarding hiring 2Revolutions (the firm hired to support the District regarding facilitating vision work with the community.)
- Thank you for the School Board’s service and expressed concern regarding the lack of respect and poor language during public comments.
- Thank you for the Board being respectful at the last meeting and requested an open mind and an open mind regarding upcoming decisions.
- Would like masking in schools to have a more defined criteria.

Chair Guagliumi also said she had a request for an upgrade or breakdown on the website by class so parents could make a choice regarding what percentage of students would be masked.

Chair Guagliumi said she received one personal email that was a personal attack of her character and would like masking decisions to be left in the hands of parents.

Chair Guagliumi said she also received an email regarding concern with the selection of 2Revolutions and requested a statement from the School Board denouncing its relationship.

Chair Guagliumi said she and Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen received correspondence from someone wanting masking decisions to be left in the hands of parents and not the school.

Chair Guagliumi said she and Board Member Hardy received correspondence from someone who was concerned regarding how opt-out communication was being handled by a teacher in a classroom. She said Board Member Hady responded to that email.

Board Member Barnes stated she received an email from a student who had concerns regarding 2Revolutions.

Board Member Barnes stated she also received correspondence from an educator with concerns regarding implementation and enforcements of the mask policy in hallways.

Board Member Barnes said she received correspondence from a parent who had concerns about a bus stop near his home and she redirected that person to Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell.

Vice Chair Rothhaus stated she too received correspondence regarding 2Revolutions that asked what they were going to actually do in the schools.

c. Comments

Board Member Barnes commented that her intent of voting yes on having a parent opt-out option for the use of masks was that the Board needed to look after 100% of the district and felt it was very important to find a compromise. She said her motion supported the administration's recommendation, however, if they only took that route she feared a lot of children would be left behind. She added she would prefer students wear masks but they would lose students and they would fall further behind academically if they had a hard and fast rule.

Chair Guagliumi thanked all of the public who attended for their comments and for being respectful.

10. PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Kathy Komar, Belmont Drive, addressed the Board and said she had sent Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen an email approximately four to five days prior regarding the links that were not working on the district's website. Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied he would check into that the following day.

Mr. Gary Martin, 38 McQuestion Drive, asked Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen what the justification was in terms of the recommended quarantine guidelines. Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied the recommendation came from the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services. He said he was opposed to the hiring of 2Revolutions and emphatically opposed teaching the students about Critical Race Theory. He added he was in support of having a Special Board Meeting to discuss the mask policy.

Ms. Tiffany Castellucci, South Baboosic Lake Road, asked why the names and addresses of the people who emailed their comments were not provided. Board Member Barnes replied she had

read all of the names and addresses into the record. She also suggested that the Board look into using dog feces as renewable energy; noting Lamp Post in New England was a company that did that.

Ms. Jen Page, Nichols Lane, addressed the Board and said it would not be a Health Insurance Portability and Accountability (HIPPA) violation for a school nurse to ask if a child was vaccinated but it would be a violation if that same school nurse shared that information with someone else. She also said she felt all athletes should be required to wear masks while seated on the bench and while playing their sport.

Mr. Bill Pfingston, 17 Jessica Drive, addressed the Board and said he did not agree with anyone having to prove they were vaccinated by providing a card.

Ms. Shannon Rand, 1 Blair Road, addressed the Board and said she was against having the athletes wearing masks while playing sports.

Ms. Jennifer Greenwood, Dahl Road, addressed the Board and asked what the data point would be to allow for the removal of the mask policy. She added she did not support 2Revolutions or Critical Race Theory.

Ms. Natalie Reyes-Silverman, London Court, addressed the Board and read aloud from an email she received from Ms. Stephanie Lin, a resident as summarized below:

I am too afraid to come and speak in person as there have been members of the community who have had people show up at their homes. Perhaps you should have a sign-in page rather than a recorded event with everyone's addressed. I will say that I appreciate the compromise made for the opt-out option regardless of how senseless I think it is for my 8-year old to wear a mask for 24 seconds to physical education only to then take it off. When it comes to exercising in a mask, let's use our common sense. If the parents are scared then they should pull their children out of whatever it is that they are scared of. I will not teach my asthmatic daughter to cover her face as if she is some walking form of infection. As a nurse, I am encouraging you to research what will stop the spread of COVID-19. The N-95 and the K-N95 masks are the only way to stop the spread. Take the masks off of these kids. As far as CRT goes, I think it is absolutely disgusting and I will pull my child immediately.

Ms. Reyes-Silverman said she did not want any child learning about Critical Race Theory. She added parents did not receive a survey prior to the District hiring 2Revolutions.

Chair Guagliumi asked if additional emails had been received. Board Member Barnes replied there were not.

11. Adjournment

MOTION: At approximately 10:07 p.m. Board Member Barnes made a motion to adjourn. Vice Chair Rothhaus seconded the motion.

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.