

**Merrimack School Board Special Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack High School - Cafeteria
February 15, 2022**

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

Participating via Telephone: Vice-Chair Rothhaus

(Pursuant to RSA 91-A:2 which stated that all parties must contemporaneously be able to hear and speak to each other.)

Vice-Chair Rothhaus said she was out of state and was alone.

Not Present: Student Representative Vadney - Excused

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

Ms. Heather Robitaille, 45 Springfield Circle, addressed the Board and thanked the Board members for their professionalism. She also thanked the Health & Safety Taskforce for their efforts.

Ms. Lisa Mungovan, 14 Lamson Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud the following email into the record)

I know that the School Board has decided to make masks optional for the district starting tomorrow. I think everyone knows that the School Board members will likely vote in favor of this decision as cases throughout the state continue to drop. I would simply like to remind all of you we have children in all three of our elementary schools who remain unvaccinated as well as the pre-school program. These children are ineligible for vaccination as of now, God willing, the FDA and CDC will approve the vaccine for ages 5 and younger in mid-April. I had hoped my four-year-old would be able to be vaccinated at the end of this month, but more data was needed for this age group. Please keep in mind as you make your decision tonight that not all children in our district have been eligible for the vaccine and will remain vulnerable.

Ms. Sheana DeBourke, 89 Belmont Drive, said she had sent an email to Bill Olsen on January 10th requesting information regarding the Covid tracking spreadsheet. She said she did not receive a response. She said she had also sent multiple emails to the Board with no response.

Ms. DeBourke said the studies showed that masks did nothing to slow the spread of the Covid virus. She also said she did not feel the Board had the right to force children to wear a medical device on their faces against their parents' will.

Ms. Jennifer Jobin, Merrymeeting Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud the following email into the record)

Thank you for relying on data and science and consulting the Health & Safety Task Force for guidance on masks and for listening to residents' concerns throughout the pandemic. I appreciate that the suggested provisions to use the mask policy include plans to return to a mask requirement if positive Covid cases reach 5% or greater and that it is noted that the policy may be updated based on future Covid data. I know that we all hope that numbers continue to trend downward, but it is good that those items are included. While the current variant has shown to be fairly mild for most children, we still have students in our district who may be at higher risk for Covid complications and are therefore more comfortable continuing to wear a mask. If the outcome of this meeting is to adopt the proposed policy changes, then I ask you to please make it clear that intimidation of students who chose to continue to wear masks will not be tolerated. While I expect that students will respect each other's choices, I do see how the potential for bullying regarding masks could exist. A clear message from the School Board and the administration will help to ensure a smooth transition to the updated policy.

3. OLD BUSINESS

a. Use of Masks by Students and Staff Policy (EBCVM)

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said he had a conversation with the school nurses, and they were in favor of taking a different route with the mask policy. He said the Health & Safety Task Force preferred that the nurses provide guidance going forward.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen recommended that the district immediately changes to a mask optional policy. He said masks would still be required to be worn on buses as it was a federal mandate. He also said that those students who participated in "off-campus" CTE (Career Technical Education) programs, such as in Nashua, would have to follow the city/town's mask policy.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said if the number of positive cases in an individual school was 5% or greater of the total number of staff and students in the building, masks would be required for all staff and students while in the school building.

b. Board Response to the Health & Safety Task Force, School Nurses, and Superintendent Recommendations

Board Member Barnes said when the opt-out policy was put in place they had parents' intent on record and if they had optional masks they would not know. She asked how they would accommodate for students with medically sensitive students or going home to medically sensitive households.

Board Member Hardy commented she was happy to hear that the responsibilities of the Health & Safety Task Force had been turned over to the nurses and was thrilled with their recommendation to remove the mask mandate.

Board Member Peters said she felt it was the right time to lift the mask mandate. She said at some point, however, the 5% positive case portion of the policy needed to be removed.

Vice-Chair Rothhaus commented that she agreed with Board Member Peters.

Chair Guagliumi stated that she supported the decision as well.

Regarding the prior comment regarding bullying, she said she felt it could go either way, regardless of whether someone chose to wear a mask. She requested the administration to have future discussions regarding interventions.

c. Rescind Current Mask Policy Dated October 18, 2021

MOTION: Board Member Barnes made a motion to rescind the current mask policy dated October 18, 2021 and approve the revised mask policy dated February 15, 2022. Board Member Peters seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken, which resulted as follows:

Yea: Vice-Chair Rothhaus, Board Member Barnes, Board Member Hardy, Board Member Peters, Chair Guagliumi	5
Nay:	0

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.

4. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

Ms. Heather Robitaille, 45 Springfield Circle, addressed the Board and again thanked them for their thoughts and transparency regarding the masking policy.

Mr. Brian Townsend, Merrymeeting Drive (Board Member Barnes read the following email into the record)

I appreciate Board Member Barnes' question regarding the opt-out form for teachers to know parents' wishes, especially when it comes to our elementary population. I would support opt-out and not optional mask policy for this reason.

Ms. Erin Pagen, 33 Mallard Point, addressed the Board and said she was grateful that the parents now had the choice regarding masks.

Ms. Kathy Komar, Belmont Drive, addressed the Board and said she felt the kids were going to be so happy not to have to wear a mask. She said her child had been bullied for choosing to not wear a mask and felt there should not be any bullying one way or the other.

At approximately 8:35 p.m. Board Member Barnes made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken, which resulted as follows:

Yea: Vice-Chair Rothhaus, Board Member Barnes, Board Member Hardy, Board Member Peters, Chair Guagliumi	5
Nay:	0

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.