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BURLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

DATE: Wednesday, February 16, 2022
TIME: 7:00 pm
LOCATION: 123 Cambridge Street, Burlington, MA 01803
Administrative Offices, School Committee Room

ATTENDEES

MEMBER(S) PRESENT: Chairman Mr. Thomas F. Murphy, Jr., Vice Chair Mrs. Katherine Bond, Mr. Carl Foss, Mrs. Christine Monaco, Ms. Martha Simon, Superintendent Dr. Eric Conti, Director of Operations Mr. Bob Cunha
MEMBER(S) ABSENT:
MEMBER(S) REMOTE: Assistant Superintendent Mr. Patrick Larkin, Business Manager Ms. Nichole Coscia
PUBLIC PRESENT: Parent Jeremy Brooks, Parent Bistra Dimitrova, Parent Karmela Schmaelzle, Parent Adam Senesi, Parent Erin Fitzgerald, Parent Jami Weber, Parent Kristyn Abaskharoun, Parent Erica Dyment, Parent Kristin Brady
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN PERSON: Parent Jeremy Brooks, Parent Jami Weber, Parent Karmela Schmaelzle, Parent Erin Fitzgerald
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION REMOTE: Parent Lauren Nicgorski, Parent Anne Ryder, Parent Sean Cashman, Parent Kim Solomon

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Murphy called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm read the following statement: In person attendance limited to 18 people. Masks are required and attendees will need to practice social distancing. The public can access this meeting via WebEx Technology. The Burlington School Committee will hear public comment in person and virtually. Meetings are also broadcast live on Burlington Cable Access TV (BCAT) as usual. WebEx Meeting Number: 2345 169 8669 | Password: Burlington

FACE COVERINGS POLICY REVISION - VOTE

Dr. Conti explained that Governor Baker announced that the state's mask requirement for schools will not be extended beyond February 28th. Because of this change a vote needs to be taken to remove the last sentence of the Face Coverings Policy[1] which reads "This policy will remain in place until rescinded by the School Committee." Dr. Conti reviewed the case numbers which have significantly decreased since the beginning of the new year:

- January 8th - 15th: 150 cases (students and staff)
- January 15th - 22nd: 118 cases (students and staff)
- January 22nd - 29th: 66 cases (students and staff)
- January 29th - February 4th: 42 cases (students and staff)
- February 4th - 11th: 18 cases (15 students)

He further explained that our vaccination rates are over 80% at the high school, approximately 80% at the middle school, and are about 50% for 5-11 year olds at the elementary level as discussed at the last school committee meeting. Dr. Conti's recommendation to the committee is to rescind the policy to allow us to go mask optional for students in all of our buildings starting on Monday, February 28th when students and staff return from winter break. He emphasized that masks would be optional and we would honor those who make the decision to continue wearing a mask as well those who do not wear a mask.

Discussion: Ms. Simon and Mr. Foss agree that it is time for us to move forward with changing our mitigation strategies, but are concerned about the state's date choice of February 28th (day after school vacation). In the past, we have seen spikes after vacation; we could lift it for the high school and middle school, but possibly wait another week or two for the elementary level. While Mrs. Monaco understands the point that Ms. Simon and Mr. Foss are making, she feels we should rescind all together. Mrs. Monaco and Mrs. Bond agree that families will choose what is best and make the right decisions for their own child or family and emphasized zero tolerance on mask bullying. Mr. Murphy is in favor of rescinding it this evening for the elementary, middle and high school. Dr. Conti commented that he has spoken to Ms. Deb Clark regarding the preschool, and they want to follow what the district does. Dr. Conti confirmed Mrs. Bond's comment that masks will still need to be worn on school buses as that is a federal mandate and students will also need to wear a mask in school nurse offices as they are defined as healthcare spaces; the district policy would be from preschool through high school as well as the after school program. In response to Mr. Foss's request to set aside time in classrooms to be supportive of everyone's choices and respect what those choices are, Dr. Conti agreed and will pass this request on to the principals. In addition, for those families that choose to continue to mask, Mr. Foss is requesting that the district possibly provide "high quality masks" or KN95 masks in child sizes. Dr. Conti commented that we are receiving masks and tests from the state and will look into supplementing those masks with different sizes. Ms. Simon

[1] Face Coverings Policy EBCFA dated 8/17/21

thanked Burlington students and families for wearing masks and getting vaccinated to protect themselves and others. She also added that it is her understanding that state regulations require students and staff returning from a five-day quarantine following a positive Covid test must follow strict mask use other than when eating, drinking or outside and conduct active monitoring for symptoms through day 10 of exposure. They also recommend that a face covering be worn by individuals who are not vaccinated or who are otherwise immunocompromised. Mrs. Bond added that we want to try and bring things back to normal as best we can in stages that make sense and allow parents to start volunteering.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Parent Mr. Jeremy Brooks participated in person to request that the bullying policy about masks be both for those not wearing masks and for those who choose to wear masks. School committee agrees; zero tolerance for bullying relative to masks.

Parent Ms. Jami Weber participated in person in favor of moving into a sense of normalcy and feels mental health has not been clearly addressed. Kids need to have fun days in schools. Mask or no mask we need to move forward.

Parent Ms. Karmela Schmaelzle participated in person in favor of rescinding the mask mandate. Vaccinated or not vaccinated, she does not want kids to feel segregated. Mr. Murphy reiterated that the motion before the body is to stop the mandate at all levels including elementary.

Parent Ms. Lauren Nicgorski participated remotely in favor of keeping the mask policy as is for BECC (preschool aged students). These children are all unvaccinated and have no choice to get vaccinated so their only protection they have are masks. Mr. Murphy acknowledged her concern about effective masks for this age group and we will do the best we can to find them.

Mr. Murphy reminded listeners that the motion on the table is to remove the mask mandate, however anybody who wants to continue wearing a mask is welcome and encouraged to do so. The option goes from high school to middle school to elementary school to preschool. The child or the parent wanting the child to continue to be masked has every right to do that. Mrs. Monaco does not feel we can force anybody to wear a mask, but has heard from other preschool parents with the same concern as Ms. Nicgorski. She feels the best way to fulfill the concern is for people to encourage those little ones who cannot yet get the vaccine to still mask because it makes families more comfortable.

Parent Ms. Anne Ryder participated remotely to state that out of her three children, her younger two are testing lower than her older child and she believes it is because of the masks and lack of socialization. She does not want to hold back their learning any longer.

Parent and educator Ms. Erin Fitzgerald participated in person and agrees with Ms. Ryder as she works with children who struggle to learn and read. If they don't see your mouth, they do not learn the sounds.

Parent Mr. Sean Cashman participated remotely in favor of rescinding the mask mandate for our children's well being.

Parent Ms. Kim Solomon participated remotely commenting in reference to the preschool concern. They have attended two daycares that are running without masks and have not seen a significant number of cases. She also wanted to be sure the mask mandate would encompass all schools regardless of vaccination percentage.

MOTION

Motion was made by Mrs. Monaco to rescind the Face Covering Policy dated 8/17/21; seconded by Mrs. Bond.
Mrs. Monaco - aye, Mr. Foss - aye, Mrs. Bond - aye, Ms. Simon - aye, Mr. Murphy - aye. Motion carried 5-0-0.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made by Mrs. Monaco to adjourn at 7:37 pm; seconded by Mrs. Bond.
Mrs. Monaco - aye, Mr. Foss - aye, Mrs. Bond - aye, Ms. Simon - aye, Mr. Murphy - aye. Motion carried 5-0-0.

SUBMITTED

Respectfully,

Kristen Downie

Kristen Downie
Recording Secretary

Date Submitted: 3/8/22
Date Approved: 3/8/22