

**RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS**  
MINUTES OF THE GRANDVIEW HEIGHTS SCHOOLS BOARD OF EDUCATION  
Special Meeting – August 4, 2021

The Grandview Heights Schools Board of Education met in special session in the Larson Middle School Commons.

**Call to Order:** President Jesse Truett called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

<b>Roll Call</b>	Members Present:	Members Absent:
	Emily Gephart	Eric Bode
	Kevin Gusé	
	Jesse Truett	
	Molly Wassmuth	

Mr. Truett explained that the purpose of this special meeting was to provide an opportunity to hear comments from the public regarding COVID-19 protocols for the upcoming 2021-2022 school year. He explained the Board expects to make a decision regarding protocols at the regularly scheduled Board meeting on August 11, 2021.

**Recognition of Guests and Hearing of the Public**

**Adam Leonatti**

Mr. Leonatti thanked the Board for the opportunity to share his feedback. He stated that after all the time with COVID and the mitigation efforts that have been taken by federal, state, local agencies, everyone has an opinion on COVID, vaccinations, and masking. He explained that he believes we are to a point where it is a matter of asserting power to make a decision and that voting is a form of power. Despite the fact he doesn't live in Grandview Heights, he stated that he supports any candidate who will support anti-masking and put masks in the rear-view mirror. He is against masks and continuing to focus on COVID.

**Jeff Wahl**

I have students in each of the district's buildings and would encourage the Board to find a better way to navigate COVID. Our kids need a commitment to full-time school regardless of COVID statistics. We need a Board committed to that. We need a sensible approach on masks. I don't want to hear any more about agencies making recommendations. I don't want to hear what legal counsel says about the risks. I need us to prioritize education. We tell our kids to think independently, don't follow the crowd, and don't pick the most self-protective option when there is another way. We need that from our Board. We need to let families make decisions about masks and not adopt a one-size-fits-none. If you cut through the noise and politics and conflicting messages, masks provide minimal benefit. They don't stop spittle or airborne particles, which is the way COVID transmits. Masks are unnecessary in this environment. We aren't dealing with senior citizens; we are dealing with kids that don't have a high risk. There is a vaccine available to anyone who wants it. Common sense says don't prioritize a low benefit option. Common sense says don't prioritize a low-risk concern over your primary focus. Don't mandate COVID measures. There is a better way and that is an N95 medical mask. The Board can adopt a policy strongly encouraging masks for anyone who wants to protect themselves. We need to stress common sense. When the virus arrived in November, 2019, cases increased in the winter and came down in the spring. This virus is following the exact same pattern this year as it did last year. Cases will increase around Thanksgiving and through the first of the year. We have had periods with masks and without masks, with lockdown and without lockdown, with the vaccine and without the vaccine, and it is following the same pattern as last year. We need to find a better way; it's going to be with us. A recent *Washington Post* article stated that while it may be hard to do, we have to become comfortable with the COVID virus not going away. Anecdotally, I have seen it first-hand. We put our second grader in a private school last year because we were not pleased with school in Grandview Heights last year. Our older two children stayed in the Grandview school system. We got weekly reports from two different schools and the private school was far less rigid, they were in school every day, and they had less cases than Grandview Heights Schools. We need to get back to in-class, full-time school and let masks be a family decision. We need a sustainable long-term view of this thing and not bouncing around when statistics change or when politicians and public agencies do their thing. Let's be stable, steady and predictable. I don't want to be back here in November arguing whether school should be going remote, begging to return to full-time school. We have got to find a better way. A better way is no mandate and an optional mask policy to wear an N95 mask for anyone with an issue. Teachers can control and prevent any teasing of students wearing masks. I don't want to hear the word pivot and I don't want to hear anything other than full-time school. We have got to find a way to do this.

## Melissa Bondy

I want to thank the Board and all of our Administrators for all of the hard work that you do on behalf of our students. As a lawyer who represents public school districts across the state of Ohio, I am well aware of what this pandemic has asked of all elected school board officials; I know it has not always been an easy road, and it is littered with critics.

Last year, my kids stayed in the Florida Virtual School Academy option offered by the Board all year long. It worked for them, and our family. That is not an option for them this year.

Luckily, some of our students have had the opportunity to elect to get the COVID 19 vaccine. But of course, none of our students under the age of 12 have been afforded that opportunity yet; and while it is hopefully on the horizon, it looks like it may not be available until the end of this calendar year.

I am here to ask that you do all that you can to protect those who have not yet been afforded this opportunity. You can do this by implementing and enforcing a universal masking policy, ideally for all students, but at a minimum for grades K-8. I am well aware of the legislation that will go into effect in October which will prohibit treating the vaccinated and the unvaccinated differently in required protective measures, but it is not October yet. For our K-8 students, universal masking is one of the protections you can give to them, and when layered with other protections, we know it works.

Last spring taught us several of things:

- First, that universal masking worked.
- Second, that most kids did not passionately rebel against masks; they demonstrated to all of us that they could mask effectively and were just happy to be in school.
- Third, we know that universal masking will prevent widespread isolations and quarantines when there is the inevitable positive COVID case in a classroom; this is true even where social distancing is not possible – because we know that if both parties are masked, quarantine is not required.
- Finally, we learned that quarantine is disruptive to in-person learning. Let's avoid it where we can.

In the simplest terms, wearing a mask is a protective health measure. Football helmets do not always protect against a concussion, but we still require this protective health measure to be worn by our football players. We do not tell them in the name of their personal liberties, that the use of a protective helmet is “optional.” Nor do we tell our chemistry students that protective safety goggles in the lab are “optional.”

The US Department of Education's Return to School Roadmap released just this week, encouraged “layered strategies” to prevent COVID 19 from spreading in schools. So, in addition to a universal masking policy, I am asking the Board to consider the layering of additional protective measure for our students.

- While masking is the first layer, it is followed by physical distancing. I am interested to see how the new building will impact Grandview's ability to distance, but I know last year the Board told the community that with all-in attendance physical distancing would not be possible.
- So, the next strategy is improved ventilation. I am asking that the Board consider utilizing the state-of-the-art ventilation in the new buildings for those students who have not been afforded the opportunity to vaccinate. I know that the plan is to put the HS student in the new building and the master schedules is probably close to being finalized, but please give serious consideration to putting the middle schoolers in this space as an extra safety measure.
- The last layer of protection I am asking the Board to consider is to revisit its screening and testing protocols. We know that robust screening and testing will result less isolations and quarantines. The CARES Act gave school districts the money for the BINAX rapid testing, and these tests can be administered quickly and coupled with telehealth support. Please consider this as an additional way to prevent the spread of COVID 19 this year.

I have always loved that I have been given the opportunity to represent public school districts. I know that public education is the foundation of so much of what we do and believe in this country. I passionately believe that educators and school board members do what they do, because they truly care about kids. And I know they want to do the right thing for kids. I am asking this Board to do the right thing for our kids. Protect them with all of the protective safety measures you are able to layer together for them.

I am acutely aware that the decisions I am asking you make will not please everyone. I know at of at least one Central Ohio Superintendent who has shared that if their Board adopted a universal masking policy, they would be sued. Demonstrating true and genuine leadership, is not always easy, but I am asking that you do it anyway. Thank you for your time.

## **Les Hollar**

Thank you for the opportunity to hear input from our community. I am sure everyone has been affected by COVID-19, whether it be mental health, changes in jobs, infection, or even loss of loved ones. I know it affects everyone and everyone has strong feelings. There are a few things that I have noticed with my family. I work for a business that has stayed in business every day throughout COVID and we have experienced minimal interruption. I believe my daughter's academic success has been affected. She is a bright girl but her education has been impacted by the situations that have occurred in the last year. The ability for teachers to conduct professional teaching as we are accustomed to in Grandview has been impacted. On a personal level, my mother has been in isolation in an assisted living facility during the entire pandemic. What are the things I want from my school? We promote personalized learning. That is why I am here in Grandview. If we are distracted from that, we are losing. I want students to be taught critical thinking that is advertised on the school website. I believe in it; I see it every day in the community. There are so many examples in this situation of how critical thinking can be used and taught regarding what is true and what is not, what is a statistic and what is fact. Are statistics telling the entire situation? I want for the school to be educators. I don't want them to be mask police. I want teachers to do what they do for our children. I don't want school staff or the Board of Education to pretend to be doctors. I don't want to hear media talking points repeated to me. I don't believe that masks solve anything. That is a part of critical thinking. What could we do as educators in this community that could be steps toward addressing the pandemic? We could put local doctors on a panel to hear the status of vaccines, simply presenting information and allowing us to do with it what we choose. I see very little about nutrition and how important that is for our immune systems. We can thrive on teaching what can be done with our nutrition to help our immune system. I don't want the school to resume a mask mandate. Based on what I have read, heard, and experienced, there is nothing to say what type of mask is good enough. I could go to a local store and buy anything that wraps around my head. What does it have to do? We can educate on that. Lastly, make sure staff does not engage with students to encourage students to get the vaccine. They are not the experts. This is a very personal decision among families. Thank you.

## **Dr. Jeremy Young**

I am an infectious disease physician and associate professor at The Ohio State University. I have been studying epidemiology of infectious diseases for about 15 years. I'm here to push back a little bit on some of the armchair expertise that's already been stated here tonight. One of our speakers said 'I believe what I believe.' That phrase is killing us. Even before COVID, it is clear that masks mitigate the risk of respiratory viruses. Ten years ago, I saw a patient with a respiratory virus and I would mask before I went in their room. This is science. You don't have to be a scientist to know, condoms prevent sexually transmitted infections, and masks help prevent respiratory viruses. Nobody is going on tv being paid to say whatever they want to say. When you see a public health expert on television, they're saying the facts as we know them now. Things change over time. We learn new things. But unlike another speaker said tonight, public health agencies are not all over the place. They have been consistent. So as far as masks mandates, a couple of things. First of all, the CDC recommends them. I trust and respect the CDC. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends them. The Infectious Disease Society of America recommends them for unvaccinated children. It's crazy to me that we are having this discussion. It's a simple mask. Do I think kids should wear masks during a deadly respiratory virus pandemic? That's like asking me if I think they should play Russian roulette. Of course, they should wear masks. They are not vaccinated yet. And the other thing I would have been part of the messaging is that this is temporary. The Pfizer data should be ready by the end of September for five-to-11-year-olds. The early data looked good. They've expanded the study a little bit to include more kids potentially with the Delta virus. But we will have data on vaccines soon. Unfortunately, there's a lot of misinformation out there. Sort of embarrassingly, only about 47% of eligible Ohioans have been vaccinated. Only about 56% of eligible Franklin County residents have been vaccinated. And the selfish, misled conspiracy theory driven 'I believe what I believe' people are not getting vaccinated. I'm afraid they won't get their kids vaccinated. The solution to this pandemic is not masks; that is temporary. The solution is vaccination. We need to commit as Grandview parents to vaccinate ourselves and vaccinate our children when it becomes available. This is a public health issue. If you are an adult and you want to ride around on a motorcycle without a helmet, I could not care less. If you want your unvaccinated child unmasked around my unvaccinated child, I have a problem. The science is clear. The logic is clear. Unfortunately, our children are really reaping what the selfish unvaccinated have sown. I would recommend for unvaccinated children, at least ages 5-12, until we get the data, mandatory masking. No one is talking about not having full-time school. People have brought that up. I haven't heard any discussion of not having full-time school. They would just simply wear a mask. It's not a big deal. I have an entering kindergartner and an entering third grader. They wear masks all the time in public and they're completely fine with it. It's not child abuse. It's a mask. Mask mandates work. If you don't believe that SARS-CoV-2 affects children significantly, I'm happy to show you chest x-rays of intubated children in the ICU, because it certainly does. So, yes, they are less at risk, but they are still at risk and they can get very sick and die. Months of frustration is building up right now, but these are simple solutions. They should not be driven by politics. They should not be driven by who you voted for or didn't vote for. They shouldn't be driven by conspiracy theories you read on the internet. These vaccines don't contain fetal tissue. These vaccines are not going to cause you to hear

wi-fi in your head. These are well studied, well researched vaccines. Masks have been well studied, well researched. They work. And we should use them to help prevent children from getting sick and dying. It's pretty straight forward. Again, the Russian roulette example, it doesn't make sense to not have our kids wear masks. And I'll just say again, this is temporary and have that be part of the messaging. We will have data rolling in starting at the end of September from Pfizer and soon from Moderna, probably in October for ages five through 11, and soon after that for ages six months to five years old. We will have the vaccine data. So, this is temporary. We're not talking about masking for the rest of our lives.

Mr. Gusé asked Dr. Young as the school district is considering mitigation techniques between hand sanitizer, sanitizing desks, distancing, masks, short of mandating vaccine, what would be the number one mitigation technique in your opinion?

Dr. Young replied that the number one mitigating strategy would be masking, I would think. The CDC recommends distancing of three feet because unlike some misinformation that was propagated tonight, not only do masks work, but still most transmission is droplet. In special situations it can be aerosol, but the vast majority is droplet, which is three feet. So, masking, obviously hand hygiene is helpful. All of these together as a mitigation strategy, but masking is very helpful. And again, this was not something that was invented by the CDC with COVID-19. Masking for physicians who see people with respiratory viruses has been the case since I was in medical school 20 years ago. This is well established. Thank you.

#### **Dr. Drew Kalnow**

I have an upcoming third grader, which is my main priority for coming to talk tonight, but I am also an emergency medicine physician here in Columbus. I have seen COVID first-hand. I have experienced the ravage that is placed on a lot of patients, families, and obviously the society issues that have gone with the two, and I want to firmly express my desire to have masking in our schools universally. Like Dr. Young just said, and we did not coordinate this at all, and in fact, I have never met him before, but I agree with everything he just said. Masking is the number one way that we are going to prevent spread of infection in our schools. And, it's the way that we're going to maintain the integrity of our school year, how we're going to keep our kids in school, keep them from quarantine, keep them from infection. Right now, we are facing a surge of COVID. Again, it's coming from the south, which is weird seasonally, that we'd be seeing an upper respiratory or a respiratory virus surging from warm southern states this time of year. What keeps me up at night is that this Delta variant is more contagious. It's more severe. It's more devastating, particularly for our pediatric patients. So, the evidence coming out of Arkansas and this is relatively new, and they're surging down there right now, is close to 10% of hospitalizations are pediatric patients. That is a 10-fold increase of what we saw this past winter in pediatric hospitalizations. That's our unvaccinated cohort. That is my child. That is what our kindergarten through sixth grade school is. When we move into vaccinated people, the vaccine is preventing severe infection. It's not preventing infection as well as we had liked with this new variant, although it's incredibly effective in preventing severe illness. But the other thing it's not really preventing is transmission. So, somebody with asymptomatic or mild symptoms of this Delta variant, is spreading viral particles, viral shed at the same rate as an unvaccinated person with the infection or similar rate. The way that we prevent this is through masking. That's evidence. That's data. It's there. So, at the end of the day, what we want, what everyone in this room wants, is for our kids to be in school learning, to maintain the academic integrity of our school year, to get through COVID. And, trust me, nobody wants to be through COVID any more than I do. The way that we're going to do this, the way that we come together as a community, the way that we keep our academic integrity and the integrity of the school year is universal masking. Thank you.

Mr. Gusé stated that the Board has received communication from community members that as a small community we should do things differently. From your medical professional opinion, being a small community, are we at any less risk of COVID?

Dr. Kalnow stated that he thinks our community is in a really good spot overall, but stated that we are in Franklin County, Ohio. This is the most populous county, I believe, in Ohio, if not close to. We are not isolated. We live amongst whoever else is around us. Our kids play sports against other teams, whether it's within the school district or whether it's club sports. We work outside of Grandview Heights. We have family. We have friends. We travel. We are not in an isolated community away from everything else. We need to act as though we are like everybody else and the way that we do that is following the guidelines and recognizing that. I think we are in a good position but that doesn't mean we're better than the guidelines. In fact, because of our position and those guidelines, I think that we have a great chance of getting through the school year with universal masking.

#### **Dr. Elizabeth Mitchell**

I am a pediatric cardiologist, so I can speak firsthand to the patients that I have taken care of who have gotten the coronavirus infection and who have had severe manifestations of coronavirus infection, including but not limited to severe heart dysfunction, necessitating significant lifesaving measures. I am also a parent to two upcoming kindergarteners, as well as a seven-month-old baby. So, my entire family outside of my husband and I, all of my

children are unvaccinated because they are not yet eligible to receive the vaccine. I have a lot of trepidation about sending my unvaccinated kindergarteners to school in the middle of a deadly pandemic, during what is a surge of a highly transmissible variant of this virus, as well as understanding the risks that they have to be bringing the virus back home to my unvaccinated baby. My recommendations tonight to the Board stem from both the American Academy of Pediatrics as well as the Centers for Disease Control. The American Academy of Pediatrics' policy considerations say that the AAP strongly advocates that all policy considerations for school plans should start with the goal of keeping patients safe and physically present in school. I think that mirrors a lot of what people from both sides of the aisle have said tonight. We want in-person education and we want to keep our kids safe. The only logical way to do that is by supporting a universal masking policy. I won't read all of this here this evening that I have brought but I am happy to share it with anybody who is interested. I have policy statements from both the Centers for Disease Control, as well as the Academy of Pediatrics. What I think is most concerning to me is this particular paper regarding COVID-19 infection among children and adolescents. I think it is a misconception that children are not at risk to be seriously ill from coronavirus infection. I have seen it firsthand. The Centers for Disease Control have all seen that firsthand during the past several months and years. There have been 271 COVID-19 deaths among children aged five to 17 years old. In my medical opinion, and in my personal opinion, that is 271 too many deaths for our children. Additionally, there is data that suggests that in unvaccinated individuals, even in the setting of high rates of community transmission, and currently Franklin County is in a substantial rate of viral transmission, that mitigating measures, including layering policies such as masking, help reduce the spread of coronavirus in schools. I won't go over all of the examples that they set forth here, but like I said, I am happy to share this information with anybody who is interested. The bottom line is that universal masking works. It helps prevent the spread of disease. It helps keep our children safe, and it's relatively easy. I have two five-year-old boys who have been wearing masks throughout the entire pandemic, and they have done so just fine. In addition to universal masking, things like cohorting students I think is also going to be something that is an important consideration to help our kids stay safe and reduce the rates of exposure. Thank you.

### **Kathy Lithgow**

I sent all of you an email earlier today, but I just wanted to put it on the record. So, I'm going to repeat a good part of the essence. The three doctors who preceded me said things extremely eloquently, so this is going to actually sound like a broken record, but here we go. I was on the school board for 12 years. It's been 10 years now but I do remember the difficult days, and I don't envy you guys at all. But, I know that you're strong and that you can do what's right, because your primary reason for being here is for the best for our kids. More importantly for this discussion, though, is that I am a medical laboratory scientist, currently retired, but I did it for about 45 years. I very much believe in science. I very much believe in vaccination. And I have believed in vaccination since I was a child. I do remember getting the sugar cube with the polio vaccine on it. That's how old I am. As you talk about getting ready for this school year, I know that your primary objective, aside from keeping the kids safe, is to make sure that they get a good education and they stay here in person, if at all possible. As the Delta variant spreads, the case numbers keep climbing, and elementary kids are not able to be protected by vaccination yet, it's the responsibility of the adults around them to keep them safe. They don't have a choice, but the adults can be the adults in the room. The best way to keep them safe from this virus is to follow the CDC recommendations, the AAP recommendations that Dr. Mitchell just mentioned, and have all of the students, teachers, staff members and visitors who walk into school wear a mask at all times, in addition to the distancing and the ventilation that I'm sure that your classrooms will be set up for. If you would happen to make masking optional based on whether the adolescent or adult is vaccinated and giving them the option of not wearing a mask, you know darn well what those teenagers are going to do – pitch it, because nobody wants to be the weird kid who's wearing a mask. I've been around long enough to remember when universal precautions in health care were put in place in the 1980s for blood borne pathogens. In my mind, this would be similar to that. We assumed that everybody had a blood born pathogen. That way, you didn't have to ask. You didn't have to invade anybody's privacy or embarrass them. You just assumed that they had something. And, after 30+ years now, it is so routine, I bet you would rear back if your doctor or nurse didn't have gloves on when they touched you. Also, if you have masks, have everybody in the school wear the mask, then nobody has to be the police. It's just accepted. You just do it. Nobody has to say, 'are you one of those ones who are not supposed to have your mask off?' Everybody just does it. I know it's a hot button issue. I wish this pandemic could have been over by now. You have no idea how disheartening it, well you do have an idea because you were there too, how disheartening it was when the numbers started going back up in July after being so low in June. It was really depressing. It took me awhile to get to the point where I could even talk about that one, speaking of mental health. I can give you a few statistics, and I did look up a few after I set this email to you all. One of the things I did find is that Ohio is behind both Florida and Texas in the number of vaccinated people. Florida and Texas are among several states who are experiencing huge outbreaks right now, especially in Florida. That means that Ohio is ripe for a big outbreak. We could join that club. In Florida, there are 12 times more sick children sick with COVID than there are in Massachusetts, which is a low incidence, high vaccination state. In Louisiana, there are 10 times more sick kids. All three of those states started out with zero percent of their children under the age of 12 vaccinated. So, they all have the same base, but the difference is the

number of people around them who have been vaccinated and the number of incidents of COVID in their communities. I do echo everything that the three doctors said. And I hope that next week when you vote, you keep our kids in the forefront of keeping them safe and keeping them in school for the entire school year. Thank you.

#### **Dr. Mark Rastetter**

I am a family physician. I am also on the Board of Health and I volunteer my time there. I'm not speaking on behalf of the Grandview Board of Health, but I did want to mention it just because I care deeply about my family but I also care deeply about the health in Grandview. I support universal masking in our schools at this point. I don't want it. I don't think any of us do. I don't want our children to have to wear masks. I don't want this virus to be ravaging the country. None of us do. But that's the reality. There's no way that we can deny that. Understand that we have to face it moving forward. It's also rapidly mutating, which viruses do, and we have to understand that these new variants are significantly more contagious and concerning. I care for patients in the inpatient ward in Ohio State. I have a large pediatric population that I've cared for as well. As I tell all my patients, I don't recommend for them what I wouldn't recommend for my own family, and I wouldn't recommend for the school something that I wouldn't recommend for my own kids, obviously. I have a rising kindergartener who's going to be at Stevenson this year. And, so, do I want her to have to wear a mask? I would like to say no, but this isn't a personal and family decision because it affects other people. You can't have that logic going into a respiratory illness. So, she will be wearing a mask, and I support and I want everybody else to be wearing a mask. I think for all the reasons the physicians and the last person who just spoke said make a lot of sense. I support the decision by the American Academy of Pediatrics and I think their data is solid and sound, and I've reviewed it. I'm not going to recap everything else everybody said, but I will go on the public record to say that I support it. The last point is just that I want my children in school. I think there's a huge benefit for having our children in school and staying in school. I think masks do mitigate the spread. If we are not masking, there is more likely a chance that there will be an outbreak and that our kids will be sent in some sort of hybrid or from-home model, and I think that is a risk for our kids. I think it's the one reason why I absolutely support universal masking, and again, all the other reasons that were said before. Thank you.

#### **Stephanie Klupinski**

Ms. Hayley Head, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent, read the following statement from Ms. Stephanie Klupinski, as Ms. Klupinski was unable to attend the meeting:

We are a new family to the Grandview Heights School District. Our oldest daughter will start kindergarten at Stevenson on August 20. We are excited about this new journey for our family and are grateful to be part of such an excellent, conscientious, and welcoming school community. I write to you now to share my hope that Grandview Heights follows the lead of The Ohio State University and the Westerville, Gahanna, and Columbus City school districts by requiring all staff and students to wear masks inside while at school.

Like so many others, I am surprised and disappointed that as the new school year approaches, we are once again embroiled in debates over masks. We had all hoped that the wide availability of vaccinations, combined with our enhanced understanding of how COVID-19 is transmitted, would mean that the 2021-22 school year could open more normally, without many of the COVID-19 precautions that schools employed last year. Of course, sadly, that is not the case.

The Delta variant is spreading in Ohio and across the country. On August 2, 2021, the Columbus Dispatch published that six counties in central Ohio, including Franklin, have jumped to the second highest level on the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) transmission map, indicating substantial community spread. It is the growing threat of the Delta variant that has prompted the CDC and other leading health organizations to recommend that schools require everyone to wear masks indoors. And it's why employers like Wal-Mart and Target are once again requiring employees to wear masks, regardless of vaccination status.

While it is true that most children who do get COVID-19 have milder symptoms compared to older people, there have been numerous kids who have suffered tremendously and even died from COVID-19. Obese children, immunosuppressant children, and those with certain underlying conditions are at risk for more severe illness should they contract COVID-19.

Our daughter—like many other students at Grandview Heights, I imagine—falls into one of those categories. She has a laryngeal cleft and severe tracheomalacia. We have taken her to the emergency room at least half a dozen times for breathing complications after she contracts a simple cold. We shudder to think what might happen to her if she were to get COVID-19. My husband and I kept her at home for an entire year, from March 2020 through March 2021. At that point, knowing that teachers had the opportunity to receive the vaccine and feeling comforted by the protocols her schools was using, including mandatory masking and social distancing, we sent her to pre-k. The school continued

these protocols for the rest of the year, and I am happy to report there were no COVID cases in her classroom. My child never complained about wearing her mask and was simply thrilled to be able to attend school and see her friends.

We understand that no school can ensure that our daughter or any child is completely safe. But we know that there are many steps schools can take to provide a safer environment for staff and students. One of the simplest and most cost-effective steps a district can take now in the face of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is to require everyone at the school to wear masks while indoors (allowing, of course, for approved medical exemptions). We deeply hope that the Grandview Heights School District continues to require masks while indoors for all staff and students, and we are happy to support you in any way. Thank you.

### **Patti Zettler**

Ms. Hayley Head, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent, read the following statement from Ms. Patti Zettler, as Ms. Zettler was unable to attend the meeting:

Thank you for the opportunity to have my comments read at this meeting, I'm sorry that I can't be there in person.

To give you a bit of background about me, my name is Patti Zettler. I'm a parent of a rising second grader and a 4 year old. In my professional life, I have worked in public health law and regulation for over a decade, including as an associate chief counsel in the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's Office of the Chief Counsel. I'm now a professor at Ohio State's law school, where I teach FDA law and torts, among other things. I'm also serving on a National Academies of Sciences committee that is providing advice on public health emergency preparedness to the Department of Health and Human Services' Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response.

I care deeply about this community, and our kids, as I know everyone at this meeting does. For that reason, I want to start by acknowledging what I know is our shared goal: providing our kids the best educational experience possible under the circumstances that we're in.

On a number of occasions last year, students needed to both quarantine (if exposed) and isolate (if infected). Given the increased contagiousness of the virus, this will increase this year -- even with masks.

While removing masks may seem optimal in the short term, with the Delta variant, and other variants that are emerging, it will lead us to both more infection and need for quarantine.

The current COVID surge is expected to peak in mid-October in the US. The earlier peak is due to the higher infectiousness of the variant.

Quite simply, removing mask mandates in schools will increase the chances that we will need to move to hybrid or online learning this fall.

In my opinion our best bet to stay fully open this fall -- ensuring the best long-term benefit for all of our kids -- is to use a layered public health approach. This should include:

- vaccinations for all eligible
- indoor mask use by all regardless of vaccination status
- And, ideally, improved ventilation (such as with windows and/or HEPA air filters)

This layered approach, including masks, would be consistent with CDC and local public health recommendations. It would also be consistent with what other school districts are doing, and what Ohio State is doing for the fall.

Thank you for your time. I appreciate your consideration of these comments, and I want to thank everyone here for their care for our kids and our schools.

### **Presentation – Superintendent Andy Culp**

Superintendent Andy Culp thanked those in attendance and those who shared public comments with the Board. He explained that while he did not anticipate it would be necessary to have a discussion around masking for the upcoming school year, the surge in COVID-19 cases has made it a reality. He also stated that throughout his career when he has been faced with difficult or challenging decisions, it has always served him well to put the children at the center of the decision.

Mr. Culp also highlighted the following:

- The school district does not have the authority to move to hybrid or remote learning based on recent legislation passed by the Ohio legislature.
- The 43212 zip code area which includes Grandview Heights has a high rate of vaccination among eligible individuals.
- Children 12 and under have not had the opportunity to be vaccinated.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics, the Centers for Disease Control, Franklin County Public Health, Ohio Department of Health, and Columbus Public Health have all recommended masking for unvaccinated and vaccinated individuals in a school setting.
- The Board of Education will be looking at 3 options for consideration for the 2021-2022 school year, with the caveat that whichever option is selected will be revisited by the Board of Education at the November 10, 2021 regular meeting:
  - Strongly recommend all students and staff wear masks.
  - Require students in grades K-6 to wear masks; strongly recommend masking for grades 7-12.
  - Require masking for all students and staff in grades K-12.

Mr. Culp also provided an updated explanation of his understanding of the quarantining requirements:

- Anyone unmasked who comes into close contact (15+ cumulative minutes) with an infected individual must do a full quarantine for 10 days.
- Anyone masked who comes into close contact (15+ cumulative minutes) with an infected individual is eligible for a modified quarantine. A modified quarantine allows a student to continue to attend school and participate in extracurricular activities.
- For example, if a classroom of 20 students came into close contact with an infected individual, while 10 of those students were masking and 10 of those students were unmasked, the 10 masking students could continue to attend school and participate in extracurriculars under the modified quarantining provisions. The 10 unmasked students would be required to quarantine at home for 10 days.
- Mr. Culp clarified that this was his understanding of guidance that would be released soon by the Ohio Department of Health for the 2021-2022 school year. This does vary slightly from the quarantining requirements in effect during the 2020-2021 school year. (During the 2020-2021 school year, all 20 students in the example above would have been required to quarantine at home for 10 days.)

Mr. Culp explained the modified quarantine is significant because traditional quarantines are very disruptive to the educational process and can be very challenging for working parents.

In conclusion, Mr. Culp highlighted the following:

- Unmasking impacts an individual's eligibility for modified quarantining.
- Eligibility for modified quarantine greatly enhances the district's ability to educate students in accordance with the district's mission.
- Certain social and emotional pressures on students may be alleviated with a mandatory masking policy vs. a recommended masking policy.
- The district will follow the same protocols for lunch as it did during the 2020-2021 school year. Students in grades K-12 will be eligible to go home for lunch.
- Kids Club will be in full operation for the 2021-2022 school year and will follow the same COVID protocols the Board adopts for the district.
- By law, masking is required during school transportation (e.g. extracurricular trips); the school Board has no authority to modify that.
- The district will be focused on educating students.
- The district will follow the same mitigating strategies utilized during the 2020-2021 school year such as hand sanitizing, social distancing where possible, deep cleaning of the facilities daily, and enhanced air filters in all buildings.
- The district has a strong team of mental health professionals to support students.
- OHSAA is planning a full fall athletic schedule.
- The district will continue to adjust and adapt based on the fact set it faces.

Mr. Gusé asked if one district with a mask mandate was competing athletically against another district without a mask mandate, what protocols would be followed.

Mr. Culp explained that that masking policy of the district applies during the school day. Students would not be expected to wear masks during athletic competitions.



Mr. Gusé thanked all of the community members and medical professionals who shared their comments with the Board tonight. Mr. Gusé explained that he is a teacher in another school district and the hybrid schooling schedule last year caused an educational impairment for students. When students were brought back to school full-time, it made a dramatic difference in the educational experience for students. He believes masking will help keep kids in school during the 2021-2022 school year.

Mrs. Gephart also thanked the community members for sharing their feedback. She explained while we don't always agree with each other, the important aspect is doing so in a civil manner. She also stated that she is thankful that the discussion is only around masking and not whether students will be returning to school full-time. Our goal is to keep kids in school and get a good educational experience. Seeing the list of public health agencies that are all recommending masking for students is important and we also heard that from every physician who spoke this evening. Mrs. Gephart has a third grader and a fifth grader and she would prefer they not have to wear masks, but more importantly she wants to keep them safe.

Ms. Wassmuth thanked the community members who provided feedback to the Board. She stated that there is not any medical or scientific entity suggesting masking is bad. She shared that while the past 18 months have been exhausting dealing with COVID, the important point is kids are going back to school full-time. Every public health agency is recommending masking for students and that is what is best for our kids. She would like her child in school and recognizes that COVID is not going away. With over half of students not being eligible for vaccinations yet, she believes it is necessary to move forward with masking and get kids back to school to have the opportunity to learn.

Mrs. Gephart added that while some individuals contend that masking is personal choice, she believes it cannot be considered a personal choice when it impacts others.

Ms. Wassmuth stated that she has also read emails from individuals with the opinion that masking is a parent choice. She stated that she would like for it to be a parent choice, but she feels like until the virus is contained, it cannot be a parent choice.

Mrs. Gephart also explained that she has received emails pointing out that the Board of Education's responsibility is to serve all students, including the most vulnerable, and that really resonated with her.

Mr. Truett explained that while Mr. Culp highlighted three masking options for consideration for the 2021-2022 school year, the Board of Education could propose and make a motion for a different option. He recommended that if any Board members are interested in proposing something different that they contact Mr. Culp in advance of the next regular Board meeting to ensure such recommendation follows any laws or regulations to which the district may be subject.

Ms. Wassmuth asked if before the next meeting the Board could get the number of families that have students in multiple buildings. She also asked how the November 10, 2021 date was selected for revisiting the initial masking policy.

Mr. Culp stated that he selected the November 10, 2021 date to re-evaluate the masking policy because it is a few months out and it is the date of an already scheduled regular Board of Education meeting. He pointed out that 3 months in this virus cycle can bring about dramatic change for the good or for the bad and felt that would be a good time to reassess. He also stated that he wanted to make sure the community didn't perceive this decision as being in effect for the full year.

Mr. Truett closed by explaining the Board is likely to vote on a masking policy on August 11, 2021. Once adopted, that policy could only be changed by another action of the Board. At this point, Mr. Culp is recommending November 10, 2021, but the Board could procedurally revisit that at any meeting.

**Motion 22-007 (Adjourn)** Mr. Gusé moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Wassmuth seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Mrs. Gephart, aye; Mr. Gusé, aye; Mr. Truett, aye; Ms. Wassmuth, aye.

President Truett declared the meeting adjourned.

ATTEST:

---

President

---

Treasurer