

Andover School Committee
Minutes of Monday, August 16, 2021
Virtual Meeting

Participants from the School Committee: Chair Susan McCready, Asst. Chair Lauren Conoscenti, Tracey Spruce, Paul Murphy, and Sharon Scully.

Others participating: Superintendent Dr. Parvey, Asst. Superintendent Sara Stetson, Business Manager Paul Szymanski and AHS Liaison Jeffrey Connors.

I. Regular Meeting

Call to Order/Moment of Silence

Chairperson McCready called to order the meeting at 6:30 PM and the Committee immediately voted to meet in Executive Session. The Regular School Committee Meeting will be broadcast by Andover TV and on Comcast Channel 99, Verizon Channel 43 or streamed: www.andovertv.org.

II. Executive Session:

Tracey Spruce moved to meet in Executive Session pursuant to G.L. chapter 30A, section 21(a), for the following purpose: Purpose (3) to discuss strategy with respect to bargaining with unionized personnel, namely the Andover Assistants Organization because an open session may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the Committee. The Committee will reconvene in regular session at approximately 7:00 PM. The motion was seconded by Lauren Conoscenti. Roll call: S Scully, L. Conoscenti-Y, P. Murphy-Y, T. Spruce-Y, and S. McCready-Y. Motion passes 5-0.

III. Regular Meeting Resumed at 7:08 PM

Call to Order/Moment of Silence

Chairperson McCready called to order the meeting for Monday, August 16, 2021 at 7:00 PM.

A. Call to Order/Moment of Silence/Salute to Flag

The meeting began with a Moment of Silence followed by a Salute to the Flag.

B. Recognitions & Communications

Dr. Parvey announced that they have finalized negotiations with Dr. Julie Riley who will start full-time on September 13, 2021 as the Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning.

Tracey Spruce asked to have a discussion on pool testing on the next agenda. Per DESE, there is state funding and staffing.

IV. Public Input

Lauren Conoscenti reported that all emails are related to the agenda item.

Prior to commencing public input, Susan McCready gave a brief recap of the August 9th meeting. The presentation made by Dr. Parvey, Tom Carbone, Amy Ewing and Rita Casper and Dr. Chan is attached to last week's meeting agenda. In this presentation,

recommendations were made to the Committee for how best to keep staff and students safe while maintaining the best educational support to students and while maintaining school fully in-person. Data presented on August 9th by Mr. Carbone on Covid cases in Andover were also reviewed.

Many emails regarding masks have been received by the School Committee

Helena Han, 2 Farwood Drive has two children at Bancroft. She is very concerned about the Delta Variant and the effect on younger children who cannot be vaccinated, and agrees with the recommendations made by the health care professionals. Families have been encouraged to wear face masks. She feels the face mask practices last year were perfect, worked, and kept everyone safe.

Stephanie Barry, 124 Chestnut Street has a rising 3rd grader and a kindergarten student. They just returned from the Berkshires and it was a perfect vacation because everyone around them wore a mask and heard no one complaining about wearing masks. It was the exact opposite of what she has seen and heard in Andover. She is asking members of the community to do more to keep all of us safe. Masks work best for everyone if everybody wears them. She requests that the School Committee vote to mandate mask wearing.

Shane Griffin, 14 Sherry Drive. Thank you for pushing for an in-person school year. He does not believe masks are the right move for our children and disagrees with the data presented. He believes mask mandates have had no correlation to the numbers and that there is no actual hard science showing that masks do anything. Unless the kids wear the masks properly, the policy will fail. He also believes mask wearing causes physical health issues. Mask mandates can make us feel good, but we should be promoting a healthy lifestyle for our children. Children are less susceptible to Covid than vaccinated adults. Follow actual science rather than political science.

Jason Liss, 151 Chestnut Street. Spoke as an advocate of personal freedom one of the most important characteristics of a community interested in the well-being of its members. In particular, he believes in the freedom to not be put at risk for foolishness and myth. The idea that there are long term consequences of mask wearing for children is a myth. Every opportunity for the virus to mutate is a risk. An effective measure that has no down side is now the topic of heated discussion. It is easy to say that masks are not necessary. Rather than taking the easy way out, he is happy for his family to participate in a fully masked community that cares for each other.

Danny O'Toole, understands it has not been an easy year and a half. Gov. Baker has given us the opportunity to decide what to do about wearing of masks. He has three girls who were heavily impacted during the pandemic. Students need social connections. Two of their daughter's friends' groups collapsed. Believes masks partly responsible as they hide facial expressions and cues and impact students socially. We can't say there is no negative, it can affect people emotionally and psychologically.

Rachel Giamo, 20 Korithian Way, is not anti-vaccination or anti-mask and believes what's best for children is for them not to be masked. We need to update our guidelines and follow

DESE guidance as advised. Why did Andover need to follow DESE/DPH recommendations last year and this year is following CDC and AAP? As a School Committee you have control over about 6 hours of a student's day, not the rest of the day. She believes it is a myth that masks prevent the virus from spreading. What kept children healthy was that they were not in school that much last year. If you decide to vote yes on mask wearing please set a timeline for revisiting policy.

Peter Chavez, 49 Porter Road. The biggest impact on his kids last year was being remote all year. Having kids in-person is the best option. Avoiding any moves back to remote is an absolute goal. Masks are simple, cheap proven method of reducing transmission.

V. **Response to Public Input**

Paul Murphy thinks there is so much information out there and we try to do the best we can. We need to open schools and keep them open as long as we can and masks seem to be the best option. We are in a moment where we must be "not for self" – it's not about my family or your family, it's about our community and keeping ourselves as safe as possible.

The one thing Tracey Spruce responded to was the importance of mental health and socializing. The past year has been a disservice to students being isolated. If we don't have masks, we may face further quarantines and isolation for our kids.

Lauren Conoscenti said there were a few folks who mentioned the need to revisit the policy. She reiterates that if we do put a policy in place, it would not be forever.

Shannon Scully thanked everyone who provided feedback. There has been a lot of input. We're all tired of the pandemic but we are making the best decisions we can during another difficult year. Her estimation is that the feedback is overwhelming in favor of some level of mask policy.

Amy Ewing appreciates all the people who spoke tonight and values the discourse. This is not an easy decision and there is no perfect answer. We want kids to be back in school, and stay in school.

Rita Casper is hopeful we are going to move in a direction of improvement over time, we are making significant progress. We have received guidelines from DESE/DPH regarding quarantine and isolation and there is distinction in protocols if you are wearing masks or not. By wearing masks, the number of close contacts is reduced. The focus is to keep our students in school with their friends and to be educated and socialize, and we can manage to do that with masks. Our numbers are still climbing and we will continue to monitor this closely.

Rita Casper also spoke briefly on the best masks to wear. KN95s and N95 should be for hospital use or acute care. We encourage staff and students to wear surgical masks or cloth masks that should fit properly and changed daily.

Susan thanked everyone for their input and for being respectful in engaging in comments about mask wearing. We have to do what is for the collective good for our school system.

Lauren Conoscenti summarized the nearly 50 comments sent in via SCremote. She listed the names and addresses of the six individuals who submitted comments against mask wearing and the 40 comments submitted in support of mask wearing. The Committee have all had a chance to read the comments. They also received four specific questions received on SCremote.

1. Has there been any discussion about mandatory masks except one classroom per grade where masks are optional. 2. Please explain what metrics will be used to determine when masks would not be required. 3. If you decide on universal mask wearing, how would exemptions be handled. 4. Are there plans for the District to implement the test and stay option so students will not be quarantining for any length of time.

Regarding Question 1, Dr. Parvey responded that we have not thought of that. Rita Casper said that one of the reasons behind mask wearing is that we know is that Covid can be transferred to mask wearing and no-mask wearing, no class can be excused from that. If there is a class where everyone is unmasked, unless individuals are vaccinated, a distance of 6' is required. We also know that our spacing is not the way it was last year. We will not be in a hybrid model this year and distancing will be a factor.

Regarding Question 2, Rita Casper said we don't have enough information yet as to how this Delta variant is going to progress. At this point, we are still seeing an upward trend and that every age group is being affected. Amy Ewing said we are still on the upward trend; it is something we are going to have to watch.

Regarding Question 3, these exemptions are described in the policy.

Regarding Question 4, This will be discussed in more detail at the meeting of August 26th.

a. Policy EBCFA Face Coverings – 2nd reading and vote

Edits made to the first reading were posted on-line so the public could see them. This is the language that we had in the policy in the past and offers latitude in operational issues to make decisions. Participants for whom the wearing of face-masks is not possible due to health challenges, accommodations must be approved by the building principal and school nurse. Face shields may be used in certain instances.

In the spirit of wanting flexibility to make changes and not be tied to a School Committee meeting, it was suggested that authority may be delegated to the Superintendent in consultation with the School Committee Chair, the Director of Nursing, and Andover Director of Public Health to amend or temporarily suspend the policy in accordance with the Center for Disease Control, American Academy of Pediatrics, DESE, and Department of Public Health, which Dr. Parvey also reviewed and approved.

The Mass. Association of School Committees released a face coverings policy. Last year Andover created their own using their policy as a basis for our policy taking all of their references and putting them at the end of the policy. We are following the order that masks are worn on any school provided transportation and required when going into any health office in a school building.

Jeffrey Connors would advocate mask wearing to protect student's health both emotional and physical. If we do use these preventative measures, students would be able to see their friends more often.

Tracey Spruce moved for the Andover School Committee to approve Policy EBCFA Face Coverings as presented and amended. Motion seconded by Paul Murphy. Roll call: S. Scully, T. Spruce-Y, L Conoscenti-Y, P Murphy-Y, S. McCready-Y. Motion passes 5-0.

VII. Adjournment

At 8:36 P.M. on a motion by Paul Murphy and seconded by Lauren Conoscenti, the Andover School Committee adjourned from the meeting of Monday, August 16, 2021. Roll call: L. Conoscenti-Y, T. Spruce-Y, P. Murphy-Y, S. Scully-Y. S. McCready-Y. Motion passes 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Dee DeLorenzo
Recording Secretary