

HOOKSETT SCHOOL BOARD MEETING – August 26, 2021

Approved

**HOOKSETT SCHOOL BOARD MEETING
MINUTES
THURSDAY, August 26, 2021
David R. Cawley Middle School Media Center**

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Martakos called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ATTENDANCE

Jill Godbout, Wayne Goertel, Amy Tremblay, and Greg Martakos
Superintendent William Rearick

PROOF OF POSTING

William Rearick, Superintendent of Schools provided proof of posting.

A. Tremblay motioned to add the current community conditions as it applies to the reopening plan to the agenda for discussion. Seconded by J. Godbout.

Tremblay, last week the board approved the reopening plan which included a contingency that our procedures would be updated based on the ever evolving CDC and NH Health Department guidance.

W. Rearick: We talked about what the trigger would be and how our community looks. The transmission within the town. We have charts which are helpful as guidelines but if we had followed them last year we would have never opened. Instead we kept looking at what was going on in the schools. We are not open yet, and what is the spread rate within the school. When you look at vaccination rate you can look at Hooksett. The percent in 30-39 and 40 to 49 is very solid which is the age group of our parents. We don't know that but a lot of parents fit into that category. For the mask, we need to see a transmission rate of over 10.

Tremblay: In the plan itself the NH Health Department is only one factor to consider. My concern is it also list CDC which recommends masks regardless of the vaccination status. In the Spring, Hooksett did a phenomenal job keeping schools open and keeping kids consistently in school, but masks were required. I don't see the logic in waiting until enough kids get sick to require masks. As a parent that is not acceptable

W. Rearick: I am not saying that; it is one of the indicators they have to use that chart. They gone

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on t say, know your community and your community transmission rates. Right now, Hooksett is doing relatively well when you look at all the data sets they tells us to look at. We do not want anyone to get sick and the masks are optional. If folks want to where the masks, where them. It is possible we will quickly reach that threshold and the Board will make that decision.

W. Goertel: We met a week and a half ago on this topic. We are not a full Board tonight and we are meeting essentially on the Washington DC trip. I'm sensitive to the community input but I don't think we should be looking to change things with 3 members of our Board not here.

A. Tremblay: I'm not looking to change anything. I,m looking to invoke a section of the plan that was approved. I'm not changing anything.

G. Martakos: You are asking this to be put on the agenda and invoked without the knowledge of the other 3 members. Mr. Sullivan could have been here if we did not have a quorum. He was willing to come. If this was on the agenda, other members may have attended tonight.

Roll Call Vote

W. Goertel No

J. Godbout No

A. Tremblay Yes

G. Martakos No

Vote 1-3 motion fails

OPPORTUNITY FOR THE PUBLIC TO ADDRESS THE BOARD

Justina Austin, 2 Bay view Terrace: I work in a public elementary school in NH. I teach hundreds of students each week that come in and out of my room. I can't determine what their health is or what anyone's health in their household is like. As educators, we are put on the front line. We are taught to defend these children if an intruder comes in; if a shooter comes in. We are taught how to pack wounds form bullets. Now we are being put on the front line of an invisible virus which we can't determine who and who hasn't been exposed to. That is a big ask of all of these educators in this town. They have students coming in and out of their classroom all day long. There are teachers that service not only one school but multiple schools in the district. It is a big ask. All I'm asking as a parent is that we be pro-active. There are a few variables that people are not looking at. 1. Our vaccination rate in Hooksett is phenomenal compared to a lot of the State. However, we are talking about a population that can't be vaccinated. Why would we risk that? Isn't it great that all those that are eligible can get it but what about those that are not eligible. Is anyone thinking about that. They can still get it; they can still spread it to their peers and people in our community. When you look at the data like that, it just doesn't add up. Also, Hooksett did a phenomenal job last year keeping schools open, but isn't that what we want. Don't we want schools to be open. Don't we want public schools open to all. Isn't it more of a problem if we have to switch to remote or hybrid or other scenarios. Isn't it ideal to be pro-active and keep these kids in school so that they're learning. I just don't know why we wouldn't choose to be pro-active

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in the middle of a global pandemic. It's not a big ask. I teach hundreds of students a week and I have never had a problem with one student having to wear a mask. It's not the children that are the problem; it's the adults.

Jonah Schulte, 26 Autumn Run: My family just moved here a few weeks ago and we are excited to become part of the community. I've come here tonight to highlight some of my surprise and dismay that Hooksett will not be requiring the use of masks in school this year. After all the work that has been put in, it seems like we are giving up on safety. Masks are a proven tool that can be used to protect against infectious disease particularly among unvaccinated individuals and as you know it is not possible for most students to be vaccinated at this time. The District and this Board have stated that the guidance from the CDC and NHHS will be followed when it is determined that masks should be mandated. It has been said that masks may be recommended for all occupancy of the school building if there is a significant rise in the community transmission. It still does not go as far as saying they will be required; so my ask to you is to be clear on what is the threshold for when they will be required. There was a mention of a 10% positivity rate. That seems alarmingly high because if you consider you have 1000 students and 100 students have COVID, what percentage of those will recover; what percentage won't. At what point does it become OK for a student to become unnecessarily ill and potentially have lifelong complications or worse, death. Would any of us be OK with that happening to any of our students. Other districts have put frameworks in place based on local infections per capita, rather than this be a polarizing and politicized issue; wouldn't it not be easier to simply create a framework for which mask wearing is or is not required and simply follow that framework. Currently there appears to be no such structure in place and the public has no way to know when the requirements should or will change. It is easier to remove restrictions than it is to add new ones at a later time. All the scientific evidence and guidance is showing there is significant transmission of the virus occurring and guidance from multiple officials and agencies such as the CDC stating that masks should be universally required in school. There is guidance that fully vaccinated individuals should continue to wear masks due to the Delta variant which is known to be even more virulent and deadly to children than the original strain. It is our duty to keep our children safe and protect them from disastrous outcomes. You wouldn't tell your children it is fine to cross the street without looking both ways; maybe there's not a car coming. You would say look both ways if you don't want to get hit by a car. Shouldn't we require that same level of common sense against a deadly disease when we have the tools to prevent it from happening. I ask you to please reconsider your re-opening plan and have everyone wear masks to begin the school year so that our children don't get hit by COVID. We can always reduce the restrictions later if things look better. It seems to put our best foot forward and to be safe for our children; the right thing to do at this time is to require masks for everyone in the schools. Regarding the point about things getting worse; as Amy mentioned earlier there was an outbreak at a daycare in Hooksett where 18 children and 4 staff members tested positive. I think this is what will happen if we don't require masks in our schools. I don't want to see that happen for our children.

Elizabeth Pieroni, 26 Autumn Run: We recently purchased my parents' home at 26 Autumn Run;

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the house I grew up in. Our household is kind of old fashion and we are now a mulch-generational family, ages 3 to 70. For the past 2 years I have provided my children's education at home. When we chose to send our children back to school this year; this past June in fact, we did so feeling good that vaccines would be available to us to at least protect them and our family from exposure. Unfortunately things have changed. The 7 day average of new COVID cases since back on June 1st in all of NH was 24. Currently the 7 day average is 294. In this county alone the 7 day average is now 24, in our county. This will only increase when schools reopen if masking is made optional and also in Hooksett there have been reports of 2 separate day cares where masks were not required and significant spread and outbreaks occurred. Science is now reporting that even vaccinated people can pass the virus and become sick. Our most at risk populations are those that are not vaccinated. School children, our children do not have the choice be vaccinated. The Delta variant has been shown to be more transmissible and more pediatric units and ICU s are full across the country with children infected with both RFD and COVID. I must ask, what is the threshold that determines when you have a significant rise in community transmission? At what point will we know it's time to require masking for in-person learning. How will you implement this and insure the least amount of unnecessary illness. Have you considered the implications that remote at home schooling options have on our social and emotional wellness of our youth. And once an outbreak occurs due to not masking in doors; how will you provide support for those children who will then be isolated from their friends for a greater lengths of time. I respectfully ask you to invoke the reopening protocols to keep our families, our children and our community as a whole safe. Please, we must mask now if we want this to go away.

Scott Jacobson, 6 Short Ave: Disabled children are specifically guaranteed the legal right to a free and appropriate public education along side their non-disabled peers in the least restrictive environment. The Hooksett optional masking policy ignores their health and safety needs and violates the laws that help protect them from this discrimination. I have a globally and medically vulnerable child. There are many students like her that attend these schools. Many kids with disabilities have health situations that make them more vulnerable to contracting severe COVID. When you don't require everyone to mask, you exacerbate the disadvantages that these students must already face when it comes to COVID. We all know that masking is the most effective when preventing the projection of aerosol droplets. A mask optional policy does not sufficiently protect students that opt to mask and offers no protections to students like my child who legitimately cannot wear a mask. Under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, schools are legally obligated to accommodate the needs of disabled students to insure that they have access to FAPE which is an acronym for "Free and Appropriate Public Education". When you do not require all students to mask at the height of a global pandemic, you create a needless and unlawful barrier to education for medically vulnerable, disabled and typical students alike. You might think, send your disable kid to a private school, keep them at home, have them do VLAC, home school them. But when a parent accepts a voucher to a private placement they waive their child's right to a Free and Appropriate Public Education. Most students that have a 504 plan or an IEP cannot receive instruction remotely. You cannot legally exclude children from public

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schools by failing to accommodate their safety needs. There are lawsuits all over the country regarding this issue which have been yet to be ruled upon. I don't think Hooksett would like to be in the position of having to defend themselves over discriminatory policies in court. Win or lose; it could be costly.

Erin Plante, 50B Whitehall Road: I live in Hooksett with my two (2) children who are 6 and 9. I have lived in Hooksett for 4 years. I am requested that the Board reconsider the reopening plan for the upcoming school year. The Board has stated that the current plan follows current health guidelines. However, the most recent and updated guidelines, both national and local conflict with the policy of voluntary masking. As of today, national and state public health entities recommend the following: CDC – universal masking; American Academy of Pediatrics- all students older than two (2) and all school staff; NH Division of Public Health Services DHHS – face masks are recommended for everybody universally when any of the following criteria are met. 1. Level of NH community transmission reaches substantial in the region, not he town, where the school or childcare program is operating. Currently, the NH COVID-19 dashboard identifies community transmission to be substantial in Merrimack County and all regional areas at the State. The Board has noted that decision about masking are focused on one data point; specifically for the town of Hooksett; not the region or county, nor the State. However, per Governor Sununu, Dr. Chan, and other public health experts, determining community transmission risk and response requires more than one piece of information. Instead, multiple puzzle pieces must come together to give a clear picture. To further gauge transmission risk for Hooksett and our schools, I've explored tools through the NH COVID-19 dashboard and the CDC. The map on the dashboard site identifies the rate of new cases for 100,000 over the last 14 days, including for specific towns. As of today, the rate for Hooksett 230.; Auburn is 496; Manchester is 273; Derry is 262; Statewide is 272.9. The CDC offers guidance on how to interpret this data through tables with core indicators for transmission in schools. According to this model, Hooksett's rate of 230 indicates the highest risk of transmission in schools. Anything over 200 indicates highest risk; not low, not moderate, not high, but highest. Today's 7 day average Statewide is 300. This average has been steadily increasing since the end of June. Today's average is a 31% increase over the most recent 7 day period. Current numbers and trends are a reflection of data from mid November of last year; the beginning of the winter surge. This is happening even before the school year starts. Hospitalizations have also been trending upwards Statewide and in our region. We have gone from 13 at the beginning of July to 122 today. Finally, it has come to my attention today that there has been an outbreak of COVID-19 in a Hooksett Childcare Center. An outbreak impacting over 20 staff, children and of course their community. Despite this, the district and community do have tools to help prevent transmission. NH's own school and childcare tool kit includes use face masks wisely as a key prevention tool. On page 5 of the public health guidance identifies four (4) key factors in determining whether face masks should be required or recommended. First is level of transmission reported at the county level with cities of Nashua and Manchester separated out. Currently that is substantial. Number of cases of COVID-19 occurring within your school or childcare facility, yet schools are not open. Your ability to implement other prevention strategies. For example, if you can separate

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children who are
(G. Martakos imposed the 3 minute rule)

OLD BUSINESS

Washington, DC – Matt Benson

W. Rearick: At the last meeting we had concerns if there cases on the trip. Mr. Benson spoke to the vendor and provided the information to parents regarding the cancellation refunds.

M. Benson: A survey was sent to parents and staff. There are 157 students in the 8th grade and receive 117 responses. The question was would you sign your child up for the 8th grade trip with the listed cancellation costs and fees as the trip go closer if the District cancels or the parent cancels. I also listed if their child gets sick they need to come down and get their student. Seventy-six (76) parents responded yes, 13 parents responded no and 28 parents responded not sure at this time. (The survey was non-binding) I asked the entire staff and put out a reminder yesterday; and this is typical. Seven (7) staff members responded that they would like to chaperone the trip. The optimal number of chaperones including the 76 and 28 would be 10-11. As the trip gets closer, it is typical to get additional chaperones once people know their availability. This is typical of any year.

J. Godbout: Typically in the past, how many children go verses those that stay back and how many staff are required for the students that stay back?

M. Benson: Typically we have 25 to 30 student who stay back. The 8th grade teachers that don't go cover classes. I shared these numbers with Mr. Bennett and the trip coordinator Lori Adams and they felt the numbers were good to move forward.

*W. Goertel motioned to approve the Washington DC trip. Seconded by A. Tremblay.
Vote unanimously in favor.*

PERSONNEL

Resignations

*J. Godbout motioned to approve the resignations of Danielle Lawson and Cheryl Minervini.
Seconded by W. Goertel.
Vote unanimously in favor*

Superintendent's Nominations

*W. Goertel motioned approve the Superintendent's nomination of Donna Ellis (Contingent on release). Seconded by A. Tremblay.
Vote unanimously in favor.*

*J. Godbout motioned to approve the Superintendent's nomination of Jessie Palmer. Seconded by W. Goertel.
Vote unanimously in favor.*

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NON-PUBLIC SESSION: RSA 91-A:3 Section II (a-k) (if needed)

W. Goertel motioned to enter into non-public session per RSA 91-A:3 Section II (a) at 6:35 pm.

Roll Call

W. Goertel	Yes
J. Godbout	Yes
A. Tremblay	Yes
G. Martakos	Yes

ADJOURNMENT

The next regularly scheduled meeting of the Hooksett School Board is Tuesday, September 21, 2021 at 6:00 pm. at the David R. Cowley Middle School Media Center.

The SAU #15 Board will meet on Wednesday, September 15, 2021 at 6:30 pm. at the Auburn Village School Media Center.