

Coventry Board of Education
Coventry, Connecticut

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Unapproved Minutes of Thursday, February 10, 2022
Administration Building Conference Room

Board Members Present:

Jennifer Beausoleil, Chairperson
Eugene Marchand, Vice-Chairperson
Mary Kortmann, Secretary
Peter DePaola
Emma Eaton
Courtney Rossignol
Christina Williams

Also Present: Celia Delvecchio, Student BOE Representative

Administrators Present:

Dr. David J. Petrone, Superintendent of Schools
Robert Carroll, Director of Finance and Operations

Audience Members: Ronda Carrie, CGS Principal; Jennifer DeRagon, GHR Principal; Dena DeJulius, CNH Principal; Joseph Blake, CHS Principal; William Trudelle, Director of Physical Plant and Facilities; Dr. Beth Giller, PSSS Director; Cathie Drury, Director of Educational Technology; Michele Mullaly, Director of Teaching and Learning; Sarah Woodin, GHR Teacher; parents and students; and several citizens.

I. Call to Order

J. Beausoleil called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

II. Salute to the Flag

J. Beausoleil led the salute to the flag.

III. Audience of Citizens

Caroline David, 302 Pine Lake Drive, was present to speak in favor of masks at least through to the end of the year. She spoke about COVID-19 and said that people are still getting sick and are dying.

Christina Williams, 436 Ripley Hill Road, talked about making tough decisions for children and their health. She added that parents know what is best for their children. She said if masks become a local decision, she supports leaving it up to the parent.

Nisa Rodrigues, a junior at Coventry High School, was present to say that she believes masks should be a choice and we need a change.

Matt O'Brien, 3400 Main Street, was present to talk about lifting the mask mandate. His statement is attached to these minutes.

Jennifer Blain, 76 Hop River Road, was present to talk about the right of choice, and that it should be everyone's choice whether to wear a mask or not.

Dawn Viera, 337 Swamp Road, was present to talk about unmasking students.

Beau Demko, 188 Eastview Drive, was present to talk in favor of lifting the mask mandate.

Heather Gregan, 304 Dunn Road, was present to talk about masks and was in favor of leaving the decision up to the parent.

Robyn Gallagher, 984 Main Street, thanked the Board. She was present to speak in favor of keeping masks in place through until the end of April.

Patricia Hodge, 175 Pucker Street, thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak. Her statement is attached to these minutes.

Jennifer Garlock, 834 Wrights Mill Road, was present to speak in favor of lifting the mask mandate and to leave the decision to the parents. Her statement is attached to these minutes.

Mila Zadrozny, 660 Merrow Road, was present to speak in favor of lifting the mask mandate and would like to see this as a personal choice. Her statement is attached to these minutes.

Marc Doremus, 28 Brenda Lane, was present to speak on behalf of students with disabilities and was in favor of lifting the mask mandate.

Jackie Marion, 61 Laurel Drive, was present to speak in favor of lifting the mask mandate.

Melissa Sicard, 711 Flanders Road, was present to speak in favor of lifting the mask mandate.

Sarah Cook, 253 Stonehouse Road, was present to speak about parent rights and that mask wearing should be the parents decision.

IV. Report of the Superintendent

IV.A. Information: Mystery Science Presentation

Dr. Petrone introduced Ms. DeRagon who was present with GHR teacher, Sarah Woodin and two students, Caleb Longo and Dylan Murphy. A video about Mystery Science was shown and each student shared the experience they have had with Mystery Science.

Dr. Petrone continued with his report. He talked about events and meetings taking place in the district, regionally, and state-wide. He shared a video of the Chinese New Year celebration at CNH.

IV.B. Information: Board of Education Student Representative Report

Ms. Delvecchio noted that winter sports are fully underway and everyone is looking forward to spring sports. She said classes are still being picked for next year.

IV.C. Information: Facilities Projects Update

Mr. Trudelle shared a presentation containing a Facilities Projects update, which is available on the district's website, via the BoardBook portal.

MOTION: To move Old Business and New Business to ahead of the Report of Chairman.

By: C. Williams

Seconded: P. DePaola

Discussion: C. Williams said she would like to see New Business discussed earlier in the meeting because it is what folks are waiting to hear.

Result: Motion passes 6-1 (J. Beausoleil against)

IX. Old Business

IX.A. Discussion and Possible VOTE: FY2023 Budget

J. Beausoleil asked for questions by location. There were only questions related to "Warehouse/Facilities" and "General."

IX.A.6. Warehouse/Facilities

C. Rossignol noted the curtains for the auditorium and asked if these could be purchased out of the 1% account. J. Beausoleil said the item is not on the CIP nor is it an emergency situation, so the 1% account cannot be used.

IX.A.8. General

C. Rossignol asked about the pension and how it is managed. Mr. Carroll said it is town fund, managed out of the Town Hall. He explained they have an actuary. He continued and reviewed how the pension plan works.

MOTION: To approve the FY2023 budget at \$29,027,461 a 2.55% increase over the FY2022 budget.

By: E. Eaton

Seconded: C. Williams

Discussion: P. DePaola said it is a big number and he thinks it will be hard to push. E. Marchand asked what could be cut? P. DePaola said he wasn't going to go through it line by line, but it is a big number for the small increase in enrollment; the constructs are good, but the number is big. E. Marchand said we do not increase or decrease the budget by student number - he believes we are in good shape.

J. Beausoleil thanked the Superintendent and the administrative team for their very hard work.

Result: Motion passes 5-2 (P. DePaola and C. Rossignol against)

X. New Business

X.A. Information: Update on the Governor's Executive Orders

J. Beausoleil reviewed the timeline and information related to the Governor's announcement proposing that the state mask mandate end as of February 28, 2022. She added that masks will need to continue on buses as that is a CDC mandate (federal level).

The Board discussed various issues surrounding the state mandates and possibly updating physical distancing guidelines.

J. Beausoleil said more information will be available for the Board's review on February 24, 2022. She said there are two surveys out regarding masks, one for staff and one for parents.

The Board discussed athletics. Dr. Petrone noted sports have been impacted by positive COVID-19 cases.

C. Williams asked about the parent survey and where the 'continue to wear masks dates' came from. Dr. Petrone said it was a 30-day, then 60-day thought process; both of these scenarios getting us closer to spring and warmer weather.

Miss Delvecchio said students have not been surveyed. She said she believes it would be split 50/50. She added that nobody likes the masks, but it is not inhibiting our learning.

The Board discussed masks by choice. Miss Delvecchio said the social division is already there with the students; she said she believes there wouldn't be any new impact.

E. Marchand said this is an extremely maddening, frustrating topic. He said it is currently working, with masks; we continue to learn new things every week about the virus.

C. Williams said masks are not working.

J. Beausoleil said the parent survey will give us a better idea of how parents feel.

C. Rossignol said this is a good conversation to have now and we can go into the next meeting with clarity and ready to make a decision.

The Board discussed students at the high school and possible social ramifications. Miss Delvecchio said both sides will be judged no matter what happens.

C. Rossignol said when discussing this topic, when we are comparing the high school age to younger students, it is so very different.

The Board discussed how they will individually make the decision when the time comes.

P. DePaola talked about the vaccine and the information that comes with it and wanted people to pay attention to that. He added that he is in favor of people being able to choose.

C. Williams noted Tom Mooney's review and that he said Board's of Education can not be held liable for decisions on masks. She also noted the CIAC requested athletes go maskless.

V. Report of the Chairman

J. Beausoleil noted the Superintendent's evaluation process is underway. She added that the Town Council will discuss the reserve fund request to go to 2% at the next Finance. She reviewed upcoming budget dates.

VII. VOTE: Approval of Minutes

VII.A. Approve Minutes of the Special 6:00 p.m. Meeting of February 3, 2022

MOTION: To approve the minutes of the Special 6:00 p.m. Meeting of February 3, 2022.

By: E. Eaton

Seconded: M. Kortmann

Result: Motion passes 6-1 (E. Marchand abstains)

VII.B. Approve Minutes of the Special 7:00 p.m. Meeting of February 3, 2022

MOTION: To approve Minutes of the Special 7:00 p.m. Meeting of February 3, 2022

By: C. Williams

Seconded: E. Eaton

Result: Motion passes 6-1 (E. Marchand abstains)

VIII. Report of Board Members

VIII.A. Information: Fiscal Committee Report, Meeting of February 10, 2022

M. Kortmann said there is nothing notable or worrisome to report. She noted the grant award notifications and that the HEEC tuition rate for FY23 was approved. She said the Management Report is trending in the right direction. She added, the state has notified us that the excess cost may be at 82%, and we have it in the budget at 71%. She said we will adjust accordingly.

C. Williams asked that the Policy Committee discuss the procedures in Policy 8342 Construction and Posting of Agenda and noted it was a duplicate of Policy 9360. There was discussion as to whether a motion was needed for this request. In the end, it was determined there was not. Dr. Petrone said the item would come before the Policy Committee.

XI. Possible VOTE: Executive Session [Bargaining Unit Negotiations and Superintendent's Evaluation]

MOTION: Pursuant to CGS-1-200(c)(6)(A), the Board of Education will go into Executive Session for discussions related to Bargaining Unit Negotiations and the Superintendent's Evaluation with the Superintendent and Director of Finance and Operations at 9:40 p.m.

By: P. DePaola

Seconded: M. Kortmann

Result: Motion passes unanimously

XII. Open Session

The Board came out of Executive Session and returned to Open Session at 9:51 p.m.

XII.A. Possible VOTE: Approve the Agreement between the Coventry Board of Education and the Custodian Union 2021 – 2024

MOTION: To approve the Agreement between the Coventry Board of Education and the Custodian Union 2021-2024.

By: E. Marchand

Seconded: E. Eaton

Result: Motion passes unanimously

XIII. Adjournment

MOTION: To adjourn the meeting at 9:51 p.m.

By: E. Eaton

Seconded: C. Williams

Result: Motion passes unanimously

Respectfully submitted:

Kimberlee Arey Delorme
Board Clerk

Approved: _____

Matt O'Brien
3400 Main St

Members of the Board-

The decision on whether or not to continue the mask mandate in our schools will be solely in your hands if the House parental choice amendment isn't accepted tonight. You'll need to make a decision before the February 28th State mandate expiration. I insist that you take no action to implement a local mandate. It was clear during the House debate today that the other emergency Executive Orders are being extended for one reason alone- preservation of federal funding. Representatives ceded that after 2 years, the health emergency really is over.

The Governor stated that Connecticut has reached an incredibly low positivity rate now, and added that- quote "if your infection rate is south of 5%, don't worry about the masks ". We are south of 5%. According to the latest data, Tolland County has the lowest hospitalization rate in the State with only 2. Coventry right now has a new infections rate of 0.318% of the population, well below that 5% threshold. Continuing to force masks here would be ridiculous, and I think that the Governor would agree. I hope you do too.

It's time for us to return the greatest level of normalcy possible back to Coventry's kids- give them their lives back- let the mask mandate expire. Let parents decide what is and is not an acceptable risk for their kids. I assure you; parents are well equipped to make those decisions. Some will choose to mask for some time, some will choose not to. Either choice is equally valid and both should be respected.

Thank You.

February 10, 2022

Coventry Board of Education

1700 Main Street

Coventry, CT 06238

Re: Mask Mandates

As of this past Monday, February 7th, twenty-seven states have no mask mandates. Twelve states are rescinding their state mandates this month or next. Only eleven states are keeping their mandates in place. Where is the scientific evidence to support the continued masking of our kids?

The executive order our Governor put in place for mask mandates is scheduled to end February 15th. By extending the mandate to the end of the month instead of allowing it to end as scheduled, the Governor's emergency authority is extended. This permits the mask mandates to continue in many schools. The citizens of this state are not deceived. Let parents decide for their children, I encourage you to do the right thing and stop the mandated masking now.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patricia Hodge". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Patricia Hodge

175 Pucker Street

Coventry, CT 06238

From: Jennifer Garlock
To:
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Statement 2/10
Date: Thursday, February 10, 2022 7:58:19 PM

Statement

Thank you for hearing my concerns again. First, I'd like to thank you for the changes you've implemented this year. I feel like we took some steps towards a more normal learning environment at the beginning of the year. I hope that we can continue to improve upon the children's experiences in school.

I'm asking you to lift the masking requirement for Coventry Public Schools. Let the parents choose if they want to send their children to school in masks or not. After all, the children can attend sporting events, birthday parties, and play dates with out a mask. They can go to the grocery store, movie theaters, and bowling alley without a face covering. You told us before that the schools were being held to a different standard than businesses and other gathering places in the community, but this is no longer the case.

My oldest child is on the autism spectrum with a history of a speech delay. With the masks on she is unable to see how her teachers and other students move their mouths to form letter sounds. The masks are inhibiting her ability to learn. For example, she thinks "th" makes a "v sound", and her spelling reflects that. My 3 year old is learning about feelings and emotions in preschool. How is she supposed to learn to read the facial expressions and emotions of her peers if she cannot see their faces? I, and many other parents are tired of lighting our children on fire to keep others warm.

We've been told to follow the science. Well, the science says that the cloth and paper face coverings being worn by our children are not adequate at stopping Covid-19. The science tells us that we have a much weaker variant on our hands than previously, and that approximately 90% of our population in Connecticut has some form of immunity. The teachers in our town have all had the opportunity to be vaccinated and receive their booster if they have chosen to do so. N95 masks are available for teachers to use in the classrooms if they'd like. As a healthcare worker I can tell you that the numbers really are down. Gone are the days of lines wrapped around the buildings, full waiting rooms, and endless sickness. Instead, we have a shortage of patients as most who contract the virus are dealing with minor symptoms that require no treatment or need for diagnosis.

Furthermore, I would like to stress the importance of having parental involvement in the classroom. My child came home from the school last week with a stack of papers. I had no idea what was in there.

Kind regards,

Jennifer Garlock
834 wrights mill rd

Dear board of education members,

My name is Mila Zadrozny. I reside at 660 Merrow Road. I have three children, one of whom graduated from Coventry Public Schools in 2014. My second child is currently attending Nathan Hale Middle School, and my youngest is a student at GHR. I am here to respectfully ask the board members to lift the mask mandate enforced on our children. I would like to see mask wearing as a personal choice as opposed to a rule, a requirement, a limitation enforced by the school district.

As a teacher who has been working with students at elementary and high school levels during the pandemic, I have seen that the schools work very hard to protect our students from Covid. Masks have to be worn at all times during our children's 6 hour long stay at school with the exception of short mask breaks. ~~Many people including our children wear the same mask for days.~~ Masks turn into a pool of bacteria and infections. Masks are not worn with fidelity, which includes ^{the appropriate of} frequently replacing masks that otherwise stay on students' faces 100 percent of the time. ~~With this, wearing a mask just for the show, just for compliance has become a real problem not only in Coventry but in the whole state.~~

Mask wearing has a negative effect on the learning of our children. I know this because 75 percent of the face is covered when our students communicate with teachers and each other. Wearing masks makes it harder to decode people's moods and feelings. Students miss the important social cues and the important information, they misunderstand and get more confused than ever before. They have a difficult time breathing, especially when running in the gym or singing.

Most of my family lives in Europe. We have many children in our family who attend school there. This is the first time in years when they listen to my stories about schools in Coventry not with envy but with disbelief of how lucky they are as compared to us. They do not wear masks at schools. While the positive effect of mask wearing is out for debate, the negative effect is quite obvious.

With this, I am asking you to consider removing the mask mandate.

Thank you.