

The Dexter Board of Education held a special meeting on Wednesday, August 18th to vote on the District's Back-to-School COVID-19 Mitigation Plan. This meeting was both in-person and accessible virtually via Zoom in order to accommodate as many participants as were interested in attending.

FIRST OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The meeting began with the first opportunity for public comment. Eight community members spoke at this time, including an unvaccinated Mill Creek student asking for masks to be required in order to alleviate anxiety and allow students to feel safe and comfortable at school. Other comments ran the gamut from requests for mandating masks to freedom of choice.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Trustees discussed the merits of different options detailed in the Back-to-School COVID-19 Mitigation Plan (two from the original presentation, and four added after the 8/16/21 BOE meeting):

- **Option 1:** Masks *recommended* for all at low community spread level; masks *required* for K-6 at moderate; masks *required* for all at substantial & high.
- **Option 1A:** Masks *recommended* for all at low community spread level; masks *required* for all at moderate, substantial & high.
- **Option 2:** Masks *required* for K-6 at low & moderate community spread level; masks *required* for all at substantial & high.
- **Option 2A:** Masks *required* for K-6 at low community spread; masks *required* for all at moderate, substantial & high.
- **Option 3:** Masks *recommended* for all at low, moderate & substantial community spread levels; masks *required* for all at high.
- **Option 4:** Masks *required* for all at any community spread level.

Dr. Timmis explained that the Board agreed to utilize the same process used to select new Board members to guide this evening's discussion: each Trustee will choose their top three options, and those receiving at least three votes will be discussed further. Following discussion, Trustees will again vote on their top two choices, then discuss those before taking action.

Prior to narrowing down the options, the Board asked questions, made observations, and cited various authorities on the efficacy of masking. the right to endanger others; kids need stability and consistency in school and if masks get and keep students into the classroom, it seems a very little thing in order to accomplish the greater good. All trustees emphasized The Board's biggest goal is to get kids back in school and keep them there.

NARROWING DOWN THE OPTIONS

At this point in the meeting, Trustees used sticky notes to vote for their top three preferred options, which Dr. Timmis recorded for public record. The options with at least three votes were Option 2 (6 votes), Option 2A (6 votes) and Option 4 (4 votes). [See meeting minutes for trustee votes]

Trustee Bruderly explained her preference for Option 4 by reiterating that over half of Dexter's student population cannot be vaccinated, and she cannot in good conscience vote for an option that doesn't protect everyone.

Trustee Lundy favored Option 2, saying it would give people hope that down the road we can do something different, i.e. a light at the end of the tunnel. He reminded the Board that whatever we vote, this topic will be revisited as things change.

Trustee Arnold liked 2A for the same reason: to provide hope when we hit low community spread again. Trustees Kangas and Greatorex agreed, saying it gives both the best protection (unlikely we'll get down to low spread) and provides light at the end of the tunnel.

Following these comments, Trustees voted on their top two preferences, those receiving at least three votes were Option 2A and Option 4. Several Trustees agreed they liked the light at the end of the tunnel analogy. Trustee Bruderly stated she would support the Board's decision, but would vote for Option 4 as it is in line with CDC recommendations.

ACTION ITEMS

Brian Arnold made a motion that the Board of Education approve Option 2A for the Back-to-School COVID-19 Mitigation Plan. Melanie Szawara seconded the motion. The final vote was 6-1, with Trustee Bruderly voting against.

SECOND OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Following the vote, the floor was opened for the second opportunity for public participation. Hearing from students, staff and parents, comments again covered the spectrum; some were "thrilled" with the Board's vote and others "deeply disappointed." Additional points raised included revisiting the options as spread levels change, how classes such as band will run this year (when students take off masks) and a more robust, DCS-taught virtual option.

BOARD COMMENTS

Trustee Arnold reminded attendees that the District will shortly be sending out a survey to all families to gauge interest in virtual instruction.

CALENDAR

Monday, August 30 – 7:00pm - Board Meeting - Bates