

The Board Report

Tuesday, August 24, 2021



Disclaimer: The Board Report is a synopsis of the Hampton Township School Board meetings and is not intended as a replacement for any official Board minutes.

~ A Tradition of Excellence ~

The Hampton Township Board of School Directors

Bryant Wesley II, Esq.	Board President
Mrs. Jill Hamlin	Board Vice President
Ms. Denise Balason	Board Secretary/Facilities Chair
Mr. Matt Jarrell	Transportation Chair
Mrs. Joy Midgley	Personnel Chair
Mr. Robert Shages**	Board Treasurer/Policy & Legislative Affairs Chair
Mr. Greg Stein	Technology Chair
Mr. Larry Vasko*	Finance Chair
Mrs. Trisha Webb	Student Affairs Chair

** absent*

*** attended remotely*

This Hampton Township School Board Meeting was held in the Hampton Middle School Auditorium. The meeting was audio/video simulcast so that community members could watch remotely, and was also audio/video recorded.

Members of Administration in Attendance

Dr. Michael Loughead	Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Rebecca Cunningham	Assistant Superintendent of Schools
Mr. Jeff Kline	Director of Administrative Services
Dr. Ed McKaveney	Director of Technology
Mr. Josh Kellogg	Network Administrator
Donald Palmer, Esq.	Solicitor

August 24, 2021

Voting Meeting

A video recording of the meeting can be viewed [here](#). The time within the video that each section begins is indicated below.

Call to Order

(7:20)

Mr. Wesley called the meeting to order. Mr. Kline took roll call; Mr. Shages participated remotely. Mr. Vasko was not present.

Mr. Wesley explained the rules for public comment, asking the audience to be courteous and respectful of each speaker. For speakers who made public comments at previous meetings, Mr. Wesley asked them to minimize their time speaking unless discussing a different topic.

Public Comment

(10:14)

Community Member

10:21

A parent with elementary, middle and high school students thanked the Board for allowing time for community members to speak. He cited data from Allegheny County that was recently shared with Hampton school families, suggesting that it did not warrant a mask mandate at the Middle and High School levels. He also said some Board members might not know what goes on inside schools. Further, he brought his children with him to share their experiences with mask breaks.

Student

12:33

The daughter of the previous speaker said she was excited to return to school last year, but she could not always hear what her teachers were saying because of the masks. Additionally, she said she misses seeing fellow students smile, and was only allowed mask breaks to drink water.

Student

13:10

Another daughter of the first speaker said mask breaks did not occur at all last year. She said she had difficulty understanding what her friends and teachers were saying. Lastly, she said she hopes there will be more mask breaks in 2021-22.

Mr. Stein addressed a comment made by the first speaker, stating that while he does not currently

have children in the District, he waited to run for School Board until his children graduated. The parent responded by saying this decision impacts his children, not Mr. Stein's.

Student

14:50

A student said school is already difficult for him, but masks make it more difficult for him to learn. He said he has trouble hearing what his teachers are saying, and they often have to repeat themselves. Further, he said masks should be optional as he has trouble focusing when wearing them.

Student

15:30

A student said his parents know what is best for him; therefore, masks should be optional. Also, he said he sweats and struggles to breathe when wearing a mask during physical activities.

Community Member

16:05

A community member asked Board members and administrators to lower their masks so she could recognize them and see their facial expressions. She noted the high survival rate of COVID-19 in children and adults ages 20-50. Though she does not have children in the District, she supports the school system as a taxpayer. She read a quote that supports the constitutional right to medical and religious freedom. Lastly, she urged the Board to allow students the opportunity to show their faces in school by making masks optional.

Community Member

19:18

A longtime resident of Hampton thanked the Board for allowing community members to speak uninterrupted in previous meetings. She stated that there is a corrupt agenda behind the pandemic that is pushing fear onto the public. She said case increases should be disregarded and that masks are not effective. Further, she said the annual flu kills more children and healthy children do not need masks.

Community Member

28:35

A parent of two Hampton graduates and two current students cited a study that suggests masks do not protect against COVID-19. He also noted that mask-wearing has contributed to mental health concerns and suicides nationwide and that masks hinder social interactions. Lastly, he suggested that the flu is more deadly than COVID-19 and that masks should be optional.

Community Member

34:03

A parent said it is unethical to mandate masks in schools when the vaccine is available to adults. She suggested that children are not significant spreaders of COVID-19 and that school boards do not have the authority to mandate masks. Lastly, she is considering enrolling her 7th-grader in PA Cyber School, joining her two elementary-aged children who are already enrolled due to the mask requirements.

Community Member

36:17

A parent of three children at Poff stated that COVID-19 mitigation measures are not soon going to go away. He shared several statistics relating to COVID-19 cases among children in Allegheny County, stating that zero children have died from the virus — contrary to data shared by the Allegheny County Health Department. He argued for mask choice and asked the Board to reconsider mandatory masking in the future. Lastly, he said Hampton parents will have a choice during the November election.

Community Member

45:23

A parent of three Hampton graduates and a current sophomore requested mask choice for the 2021-22 school year. She said a high percentage of senior citizens who are at most risk of COVID-19 are vaccinated. Since there is no state or federal mandate requiring masks in schools, she said parents should have a choice. Further, she said masks had negative effects on her children last year and that it is not the Board's responsibility to protect students' health. She said the community needs to learn to live with COVID-19 and stop living in fear.

Community Member

51:58

A community member acknowledged that more is known about COVID-19 than was in March of 2020, which has enabled the District to craft a policy that allows students to be in-person five days per week. He said that while masks are inconvenient, they are recommended by the CDC, AAP, and ACHD, at this time. He thanked the Board for listening to science and public health experts, urging them to continue to do so.

Student

54:41

A current senior believes that the proposed mask mandate will be the first of many measures that could ruin his senior year. He said that every person deserves to have the high school experience.

Student

55:40

A high school student stated that mask-wearing is nonsensical and abusive behavior. He said it is unclear whether masks are effective for children and that there are no studies that show masking

lowers transmission rates. Further, he noted that more children die each year from drowning and in car accidents than from the virus. Lastly, he said non-verbal communication is very important in a child's development, and masks hinder that opportunity.

Student

1:00:59

A student told the Board that mask breaks were not afforded last year. She questioned if school dances and extra curricular activities will be taken away this year due to new mandates. Lastly, she asked if she would be denied an education if she did not wear a mask.

Community Member

1:01:49

An emergency physician and Hampton graduate with a child entering Central this year thanked the Board for their service and other speakers for their passion on this issue. He said more is known about the virus now than in March of 2020 when fear was rampant. Now, he said, scientists know how the virus is transmitted, and that mask-wearing is the most feasible strategy in preventing infection. He is fearful of new variants and has seen the harmful effects of the virus. Lastly, he recommended universal masking as hospitalizations are rising.

Community Member

1:08:49

A parent of high school student athletes expressed disappointment that she did not receive responses to her emails to the Board and administration. She suggested that mask mandates are not lawful and that each person has the responsibility for their own health choices.

Student

1:13:34

A junior said she has not yet had a normal year in high school due to the pandemic. Last year, she said her grades fell as she experienced difficulty learning during in-person instruction. After switching to online school in the spring semester, she said she had a worse experience since she was not socializing. Lastly, she told the Board that masking had negative effects on students.

Community Member

1:15:35

A parent of three students who were enrolled in the Hampton Online Academy said online schooling was not a good experience last year. She thanked the Board for requiring masking for elementary students but expressed concern about the Delta variant. She urged the Board to require universal masking as it will help keep students in school while the transmission rate is high.

Community Member

1:18:54

A community member said universal K-12 indoor masking is important to decrease spread during high community transmission. Optional masking for 7-12 students would affect students in lower grades, she said. Also, she said the Delta variant is affecting students more than previous strains — causing fatigue, brain fog, and other symptoms. She asked the Board to follow the science and enforce universal masking.

Community Member

1:21:59

A community member said a decade ago he used to be suspicious that his rights and freedoms were at risk from people with bad intentions. However, he sees the world differently now and is more trusting. Unlike the flu of 1918, he said there is more information available now regarding how to stop the virus. He said he trusts research done by experts that is peer-reviewed. Lastly, he said the reason people may not trust public health officials is because they do not understand how to comprehend the research.

Community Member

1:29:03

A parent of two Hampton graduates and also a current junior stated that the masking debate has caused anger and hostility among community members whom she recognizes have the best interest of their children at heart. She said the Hampton community has always come together, acknowledging that the Board also wants what is best for the community. She said she tells her son to wear a mask because it protects others. Further, she said mask mandates are within the right of the Board under the law. Lastly, she said mask mandates are necessary for in-person learning to continue right now.

Community Member

1:39:12

A parent of two students said as a teacher (*outside the District*), she has devoted her life to children. She drew the Board's attention to the U.S. flag, suggesting that the flag gives citizens the liberty and right to choice. She said she wants the freedom to make choices for her children.

Community Member

1:42:50

A parent of a 3rd- and 9th-grader said he does not want his children to wear masks, but he understands that they are currently necessary. He said a formerly-healthy elderly family member has had a decreased quality of life since contracting the virus last year. He said students go home and see their family members with the possibility of infecting them.

Community Member

1:46:51

A father of a Hampton graduate and two current students said he is a campus pastor for several

colleges in Pittsburgh, including Carnegie Mellon University, which he noted requires vaccination, weekly testing, and a masking for students. Given the rise of cases caused by the Delta variant, he supports the District's proposal for universal K-12 indoor masking. He stated that mask-wearing is necessary for the common good, protecting those who are most at risk.

Community Member

1:51:59

A parent of three students said she has worn a mask every day since the pandemic began, though she does not enjoy wearing one. With a mask requirement in place, she said students would be able to continue in-person learning and other activities. Lastly, she said her children had a better experience with in-person learning than online.

Student

1:54:09

A high school junior said that while the survival rate of children under the age of 19 is high, there is still a range of negative effects that the virus can cause. She requested the Board approve universal K-12 indoor masking, since optional masking increases the risk of students getting sick — even if it is not a severe illness.

Community Member

1:57:19

A community member who recognized the passion on both sides of the issue said there is scarce data regarding transmission in schools with optional masking and are in-person five days per week since most schools last year were hybrid or remote with universal masking. She said hospitalizations among children in the southern part of the country are significantly increasing due to the Delta variant. Lastly, she urged the Board to approve universal masking so that seniors do not lose their special opportunities that they could otherwise lose altogether if masking is optional.

Community Member

2:01:36

A parent of a student who attended Hampton Online Academy last year said her daughter is returning to Central in-person this year. She expressed concern that desks in her child's classroom are not three feet apart. Dr. Loughhead said he will look into the situation, adding that more classroom interaction will be possible this year. Further, the parent asked why Hampton's Health and Safety Plan includes a section about religious exemption while neighboring districts' plans do not. Mr. Palmer said that regardless of whether the section is included or not, requests for religious exemption must be considered.

Community Member

2:07:50

A community member asked the Board if there is a defined, measurable mask break plan for

students. Additionally, he said that there is no benefit to physical distancing or masking in schools. Further, he argued for mask choice, stating that there will be write-in candidates running for school board in the November election.

Community Member

2:11:36

A parent said online learning was difficult for her children last year, and she wants them to attend school in-person this year. She urged the Board to follow the science, which she said suggests that universal masking will allow students to continue in-person learning without interruptions.

Community Member

2:15:27

A community member thanked the board for the time and effort put into making these decisions. She also thanked them for navigating the pandemic as the District experienced few disruptions. She urged the Board to continue following CDC guidance. Further, she said losing a single child to COVID-19 would be too many. Lastly, she said her daughter is OK with wearing masks, as she knows they are worn to protect others.

Community Member

2:17:11

A community member thanked the Board for their time and consideration regarding this issue. She said parents should have a choice when it comes to masking their children.

Educational Programs

Mrs. Hamlin (2:17:11)

Mrs. Hamlin introduced the first action item for approval which was the District's School Reopening Health and Safety Plan.

Dr. Loughead stated that he applauds the students who spoke articulately and passionately this evening. He asked students to continue to make a difference by using their voice.

Health and Safety Plan Presentation

Dr. Loughead then presented updates to the Health and Safety Plan that was approved on August 9.

He discussed CDC and AAP guidelines regarding mask-wearing — which have not changed since the August 9 meeting — that guide the District's plan.

Further, he read an excerpt from the Health and Safety Plan approved on August 9 which stated:

“At Hampton High School the District strongly recommends that all unvaccinated students, staff and visitors participate in mask-wearing when indoors. However, should Allegheny County be determined to be at the High Transmission level (per CDC community transmission levels), masking indoors

will be strongly recommended, and if conditions warrant, may be required for both vaccinated and unvaccinated students, staff and visitors.”

He stressed that Allegheny County currently has a HIGH level of community transmission.

INDICATOR	LOW TRANSMISSION (BLUE)	MODERATE TRANSMISSION (YELLOW)	SUBSTANTIAL TRANSMISSION (ORANGE)	HIGH TRANSMISSION (RED)
Total new cases per 100,000 persons in the past 7 days	0-9	10-49	50-99	≥100

7-day rolling total in Allegheny County - 1,611 cases

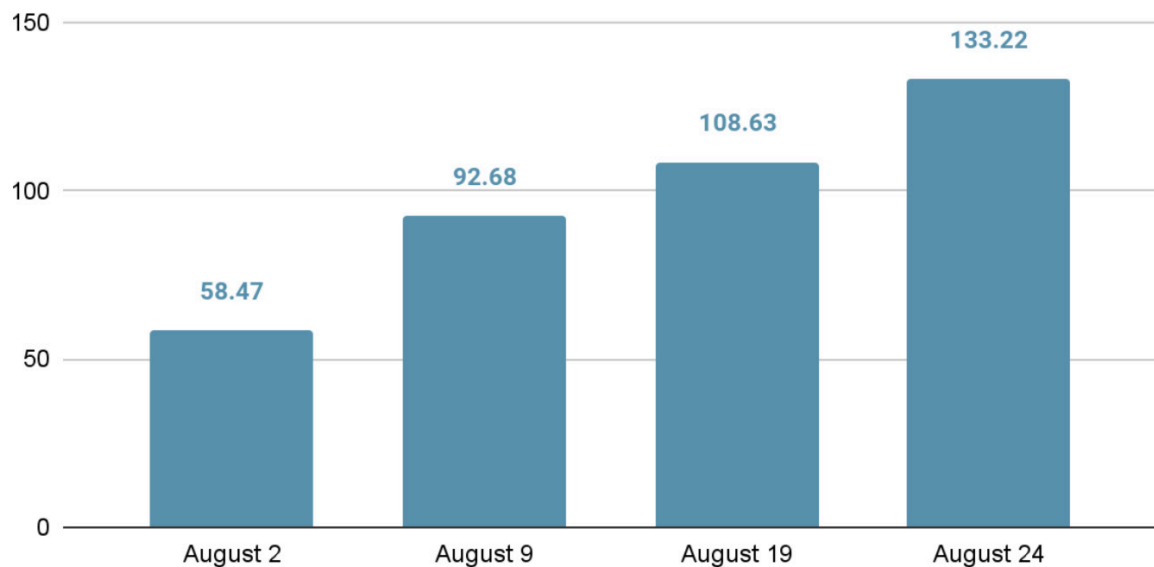
133.22 per 100,000 persons (9.53% change)

Source: CDC - data as of Sunday, August 22, 2021, 6 a.m.

The following chart that he presented shows the level of community transmission marked over a period of time.

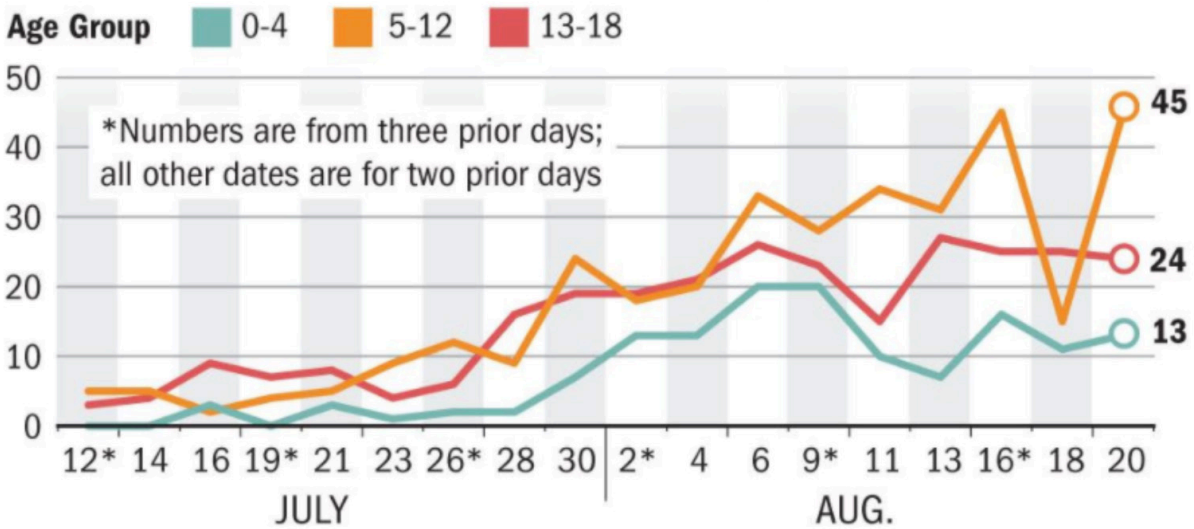
Allegheny County: 7-day cases per 100,000 residents

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)



Additionally, Dr. Loughead shared data from a Post-Gazette article that used ACHD data regarding COVID-19 case numbers among children ages 0-18.

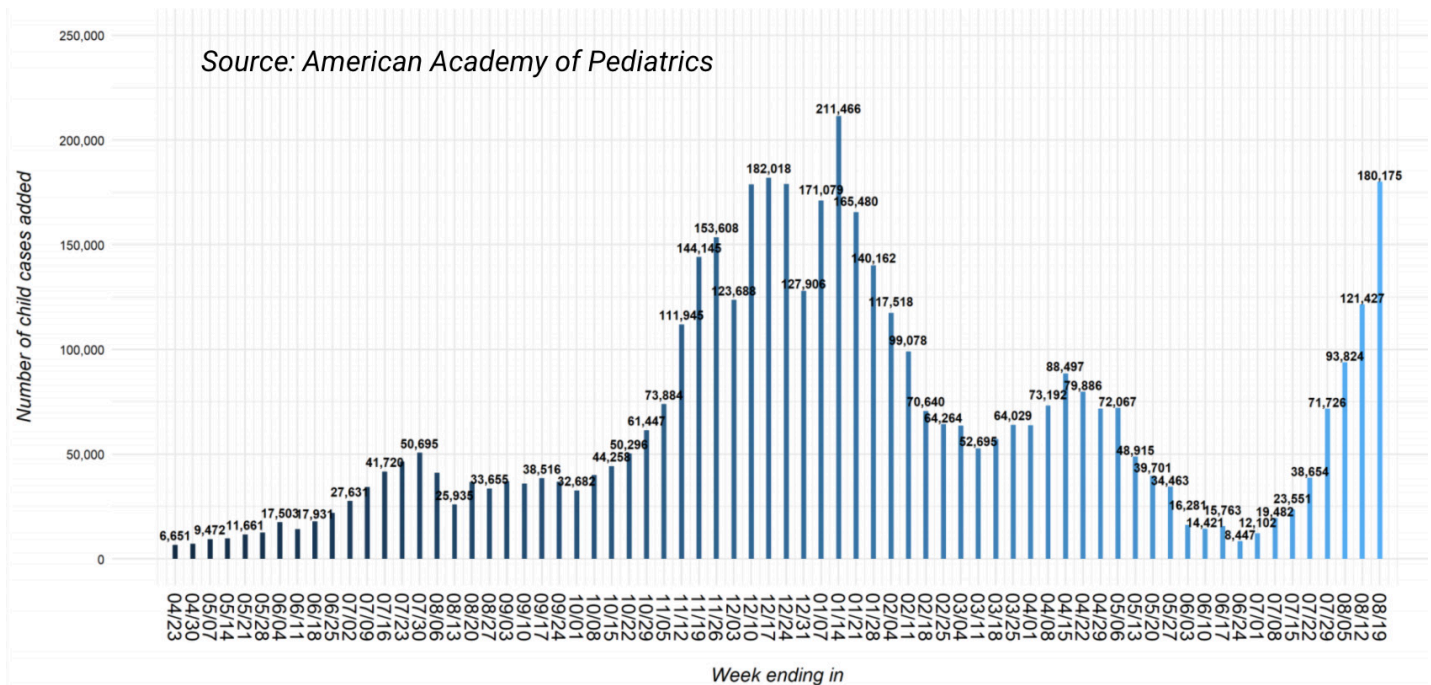
ALLEGHENY COUNTY COVID-19 CASE NUMBERS, JULY 12-AUG. 20



Source: Allegheny County Health Department/Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The data shows a spike among children ages 5-12.

Also, he presented the following graph which shows the number of new cases added among children, based on data from the American Academy of Pediatrics.



Additionally, the CDC is reporting the following 7-day trends for Allegheny County:

- 178 new hospital admissions - 33.84% change (data through 8/21/21).
- 16 new deaths - 100% change (data through 8/22/21).

Based on information provided by Dr. LuAnn Brink, Chief Epidemiologist at the ACHD, to superintendents in Allegheny County, 111 children 0-17 have been hospitalized with COVID-19 and fewer than five have died since 2020. Additionally, the ACHD brought in Dr. John Williams, the Division Chief of Infectious Diseases at UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, to speak to superintendents. During that call, Dr. Williams:

- Strongly recommended masking of both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals in Allegheny County schools. He also said masks are safe and do not have harmful effects on children.
- Emphasized that hospitalizations among children in Allegheny County have increased in recent weeks due to the spread of the highly contagious Delta variant.

Dr. Loughead also said he will increase his efforts to ensure mask breaks are afforded to all students this year.

Since the plan was approved on August 9, Allegheny County has entered the high transmission level of community transmission. Additionally, hospitalizations are rising among children in the county as the highly transmissible Delta variant continues to spread regardless of vaccination status.

Further, Dr. Loughead said the District is focused on in-person instruction. The District is proud of what was accomplished last year, with much more in-person education than other districts in the area. Dr. Loughead said that is why he feels this a powerful recommendation right now — to help ensure dances, athletics, extracurricular activities, and in-person learning go on.

The District recommended the following for the High School and Middle School:

- All students, staff, and visitors are required to participate in mask-wearing when indoors.
 - Mask breaks will be afforded to students as was previously provided during universal masking.
 - Should Allegheny County be determined to be in the MODERATE or LOW transmission status (per CDC community transmission levels), the District will consult with ACHD and reevaluate this policy.
- The District will closely monitor community transmission levels, and in consultation with the ACHD, will adjust mask-wearing guidelines and requirements K-12 as necessary.

The District proposed the same masking requirements for Elementary Schools with the following caveat: Should Allegheny County be determined to be in LOW transmission status (per CDC community transmission levels), the District will consult with ACHD and reevaluate this policy.

As a reminder, Dr. Loughead noted that students and bus drivers will be required to wear face masks on District transportation, regardless of vaccination status, as per the federal order issued in January of 2021.

Further, Dr. Loughead explained the following guidelines for contact tracing and quarantining, which

he worked with the ACHD over the past three weeks to develop:

- “Close contact” is being within 3 feet of a positive individual for a minimum of 15 minutes when masked and within 6 ft for an individual who is not masked.
 - Asymptomatic fully-vaccinated individuals or individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 in the prior three months should get tested 3-5 days after exposure. They may remain in school as long as they wear a mask indoors, as they await test results and remain asymptomatic.
- Unvaccinated individuals must follow standard testing and quarantine guidelines as per CDC. The standard CDC quarantine is 10 days without testing and 7 days after receiving a negative test which must occur on day 5 or later.
- As per guidance from the ACHD, close contact excludes students within 3-6 feet of a positive student in the K-12 indoor classroom setting who correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time of an exposure. This does not include staff or visitors.
- During contact tracing procedures, parents and students are not obligated or required to provide information regarding vaccination status or a history of previous COVID-19 infection. However, this information may be provided voluntarily and if obtained by the District it will be handled similarly to other protected health information that the District receives from students and families.
- The Allegheny County Health Department will lead contact tracing in conjunction with the HTSD Health Services Department and will notify families directly of formal quarantine requirements.

In closing, Dr. Loughead recognized the passion of parents and community members behind this topic. In his role as Superintendent, Dr. Loughead said he believes this is a prudent recommendation that the District must take based on the guidance from the ACHD and local health officials.

However, he emphasized that the District will closely monitor changing conditions in Allegheny County and be responsive and flexible to recommend changes as laid out in the plan.

Ms. Hamlin thanked Dr. Loughead for spending many hours working with the ACHD to develop this plan alongside the administration and Board.

In answering several questions from Board members, Dr. Loughead provided the following information:

- If a student is exposed, the District would provide their name to the ACHD. However if the District is voluntarily made aware of a student’s vaccination status or positive COVID test within the last three months, the student name would not be provided to the Health Department for quarantine.
- In the event of an exposure and the entire school is masked, the only students who would need to quarantine are those who were within three feet of an individual with COVID-19 for more than 15 minutes.

Discussion

Mrs. Midgley acknowledged that this decision is very difficult. She ensured the audience that the

Board is making the best decision they can. As she works in healthcare, Mrs. Midgley said she is aware of the data regarding COVID-19 — which she said does not warrant a required mask mandate. For that reason, she said she will vote “no” to approve the plan.

Mr. Jarrell said he appreciates all of the emails that community members sent to the Board. He said he read each one, including the studies and links attached.

He said he will vote to approve the proposed plan, with the rules for quarantining being his main reason. He said five-day-per-week in-person instruction is most important to him and most families.

Additionally, Mr. Jarrell said that the safety of students is his primary concern and preventing children from getting sick. He said he trusts global health experts in their guidance, including the recommendation for K-12 indoor masking in schools. Further, he acknowledged that Allegheny County has high community transmission with a variant that is highly transmissible. He said he will vote to do what is best for all students.

Mr. Wesley thanked the teachers, Board, and administration for their efforts during the pandemic. He acknowledged that Dr. Loughead has been very thoughtful in making these recommendations, and he echoed Dr. Loughead’s compliments of the students who spoke this evening.

Further, Mr. Wesley said the recommendations are fluid, as just a month ago masks were not going to be required in schools. He said it is difficult to go against the advice of the ACHD, CDC, AAP, and other health experts. Lastly, Mr. Wesley pointed out that there has been some horrible behavior at board meetings across the country, and he said it is a testament to the Hampton community that there was none here.

Ultimately, the Board approved the School Reopening Health and Safety Plan by a 7-1 vote. Mrs. Midgley cast the dissenting vote.

Public Comment

Community Member

2:55:24

Dr. Loughead assured a concerned community member that there will be a Zoom option available for students who may be required to quarantine.

Community Member

2:57:14

Mr. Wesley confirmed a community member’s question that under the current plan, the masking policy will not be revisited until Allegheny County enters the LOW or MODERATE level of community transmission for the High School and Middle School, and only in the LOW level will the policy be revisited for the Elementary Schools.

Mr. Wesley motioned to adjourn the meeting and announced an Executive Session.