

Westport School Committee
Regular Meeting
DATE: Thursday, August 12, 2021
TIME: 6:30 p.m.
PLACE: Virtual Meeting

Please click the link below to join the webinar:
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MINUTES

Members Present: Michelle Orlando, Nancy Stanton Cross, Nancy Tavares, Antonio Viveiros

Members Absent: Melissa Pacheco

Also Present: Kevin Aguiar Assistant Principal Westport High School, Thomas Aubin Superintendent, Laura Charette Principal Westport Middle School, Jennifer Chaves Extended Day Director, Darren Elwell Director of Curriculum, Michael Grandfield Assistant Principal WES, Kristen McDaniel HR Coordinator, Kerri McKinnon Principal Westport High School, Lori Melo Administrative Assistant, Sean Persico Assistant Principal Westport Middle School, Michelle Rapoza School Business Manager, Elaine Santos Special Education Director, Anthony Tomah Technology Director, 35 Community Participants

I. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance - Chair Tavares opened the Virtual School Committee Meeting at 6:35 pm. with a quorum of the members present, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Chair Tavares announced:

This meeting is being held remotely in accordance with the Governor of Massachusetts' March 12, 2020 order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law G.L. c.30A, Section 20 and on June 16, 2021 Governor Baker signed an Act relative to extending certain COVID-19 measures adopted during the state of emergency.

Superintendent Aubin introduced and welcomed the new Assistant Principal for the WES K-4 Michael Grandfield.

Mr. Aubin shared that there are 3 policies:

1. Universal policy - everyone wears a mask
2. Differentiated policy - masks are worn indoors and outdoors depending on vaccination status
3. Optional policy - choose to wear a mask or not wear a mask

There have been updates from MASC stating school committees have the authority to require masks or make masks optional.

The Board of Health and the Board of Selectmen will meet on Monday August 16 to discuss mask mandates. Right now, it is a local situation at this time.

Mr. Aubin explained the ground rules and public input comments will allow each speaker up to 3 minutes,

Comments and Statements from the Public -

Adrienne Beauregard - Rioux - Ms. Beauregard - Rioux thanked everyone for all the tough decisions made last year. The way administration conducted themselves last year was better than any other districts. She mentioned that the science was followed, for example when consultation with Erin Bromage allowed young kids to come back right at the beginning. She mentioned to pay attention to the science right now with safety of the children. Consideration should be given to what the numbers are right now,

then revisit in a month. She would like to see mandatory masks indoors for students and teachers. She appreciates everyone's time.

Caitlin Cowell - Shae would like to echo what Adrienne said and Ms. Cowell is for wearing masks.

Adeline Berry - Ms. Berry echoes the sentiments of Adrienne and she appreciates the committee with making hard decisions. She prefers to continue with mask requirements in school.

Sarah Martin- Placed a comment in the chat stating she is in 100% agreement with Adrienne.

III. Informational Agenda

A. Exploring Mask Guidelines - Mr. Aubin reported MASC made an amendment to their policy EBCFA Face Coverings to reflect new guidance documents received from the CDC, DESE, and the DPH on August 10, 2021. This is a proposed change from MASC guidelines/ recommendations. This was sent to all committee members.

Chair Tavares informed everyone we have our current policy and now we have the MASC change.

B. Review WCS Policy EBCFA – Face Coverings - Discussion was held on the topic of face coverings.

Ms. Stanton Cross received many phone calls and emails concerning that the mask decision should be a decision for the parents to make. Parents are asking to trust them to make the best decision for their child. Last year we worked hard and followed the science, however if we followed the science completely we would not have gone into school. Ms. Stanton Cross pointed out that the Governor is not mandating masks in school, DESE is not mandating masks in school and BOH has not mandated masks indoors. The CDC mandates and changes frequently. She would like everyone to be mindful and keep perspective, there are 2 sides to this issue. We are trying to make the best decisions for Westport.

Mr. Viveiros appreciates the speakers and understands how they feel. He mentioned we are in a different place compared to last year. Mr. Viveiros would like to leave the choice up to the parents. Wearing a mask will be ok for students and staff if that is the decision preferred. We will adjust if needed.

Ms. Orlando shared this is a difficult decision and wants the best for students to keep safe. There is so much mis-information regarding masks and it is always changing quickly. Positives are we learned a lot about good hygiene practice, clean schools and how to be safer in school. Ms. Orlando does not want to mandate wearing masks and parents should be allowed to make the best decision for their child.

Ms. Tavares shared this is a multifaceted decision. There is so much data available to make decisions, and transmission rates are available for our community (4.8% at this time). Ms. Tavares recommends to look at 2 forms of data. Ms. Tavares mentioned the district has taken many precautionary measures with UV lighting and HEPA filters. There is a lot already vaccinated and the younger children can choose to wear a mask. Ms. Tavares mentioned that parents may be concerned and she is open to all perspectives. Last year we followed data.

Mr. Viveiros asked about cafeteria lunch time. Ms. McKinnon responded that the JRSRHS students ate in the cafeteria last year. She is waiting to see what the furniture looks like in the new school before they make a decision. Mr. Aubin mentioned at the WES they will continue to use the gym for the cafeteria this upcoming year. Social distancing will continue, this was successful last year.

Ms. Orlando mentioned that the BOS will meet on Monday to discuss requiring vaccines for town employees and the topic of masks mandates. She asked if school employees would be affected. Mr. Aubin verified that the School Department is a separate entity.

Ms. Orlando asked Mr. Aubin to speak to precautions taken from last year and what is being done for the new school? Mr. Aubin shared there will be a UV light system that is now 98% complete, MERV14 filters are installed, UV systems are at MAC and WES, balance and cleaning of systems and air quality testing will be done. Additional air purifiers are available if needed.

C. Status of Vaccinations -

Mr. Aubin shared some data. A survey was sent out. They received 132 staff responses with a total of 94.7% vaccinated and 5.3% not vaccinated.

Students in Westport ages 12-15 years near the end of July - 36% vaccinated, students ages 16-19 years old 60% vaccinated.

According to the BOH - July 1-15, 2021 there were 2 cases, July 16- 31, 2021 66 cases, August 2021 - now 42 cases. A total of 3 hospitalizations.

IV. Action Agenda

A. Review and Act on WCS Policy EBCFA – Face Coverings -

A motion was made not to mandate wearing masks for the SY21-22 at this time, if any new information is given the committee will come back to the table to discuss further and make new decisions.

Motion by Orlando, seconded by Viveiros

Ms. Stanton Cross requested to amend the motion to be more specific and add the following: masks are strongly recommended for Pre-K - 6 while indoors, masks are strongly recommended for those not yet vaccinated and for all students, staff and visitors in the building while indoors, masks will be required to be worn on buses and vans, masks are not required when eating lunch or snacks and while practicing good hygiene, students should stay home when not feeling well, develop quarantine protocols at another meeting and place the item of Face Coverings on every agenda moving forward until all the science deems it to be not at risk.

Motion to amend by Stanton Cross, seconded by Orlando 4/0/0

Vote on the original motion: Motion by Orlando, seconded by Viveiros 4/0/0

V. Topics the Chair could not Reasonably Anticipate Forty-eight (48) Hours in Advance of the Meeting -

Mr. Aubin shared the new school building will open on time. Building leadership is working with AFSCME, WFT, and stakeholders on protocols for quarantining, testing, etc. There will be upcoming information by August 23.

VI. Adjourn - A motion was made to adjourn. With members being present and voting individually and unanimously, the motion passes.

Motion by Stanton Cross, seconded by Viveiros 4/0/0

Roll call vote:

Orlando Yes Stanton Cross Yes Tavares Yes Viveiros Yes

The Virtual School Committee Meeting adjourned at 7:35 pm.

MEETING DOCUMENTS

- WCS Policy EBCFA – Face Coverings
- MASC Update to EBCFA-Face Coverings
- MASC Policy Newsletter dated August 10, 2021

