

The Board Report

Monday, February 28, 2022



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**	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
Dr. Ed McKaveney	Director of Technology
Mr. Josh Kellogg	Manager of Network and Cybersecurity
Mr. Don Palmer, GRB	Solicitor

February 28, 2022

Special 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

(9:52)

Mr. Wesley called the Special Meeting to order. Roll call was taken; all Board members were present, with Mr. Shages participating remotely. Mr. Wesley said that Dr. Loughead would present proposed revisions to the District's Health and Safety Plan, with an opportunity for Public Comment to follow.

Educational Programs

(10:40)

HTSD School Health and Safety Plan Presentation

Dr. Loughead announced that proposed changes to the Health and Safety Plan would be posted on the District's website the following day should the plan be approved following his presentation.

Dr. Loughead began his presentation by recounting his comments from the Board meeting on February 14 about a very encouraging meeting that he had had with Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) officials. Dr. Loughead highlighted that ACHD officials indicated at that time that Allegheny County could reach a "Moderate" level of community transmission by the week of the February 28 Board meeting, per the previous CDC metrics. ACHD had also confirmed that the CDC would be making substantive and significant changes to its guidelines based on Omicron data across the country.

This encouraging news prompted the District to begin planning ahead for probable changes that might occur relative to guidelines for masking and mitigation under the current conditions. On Friday, February 25, the CDC updated its guidelines, and the District wanted to be responsive to those changes and immediately provide information to the school community about proposed changes that would be made. On February 25, the District had informed school families of its plans to revise the Health and Safety Plan, which included a transition to optional masking. Dr. Loughead clarified that the CDC does not require wearing of masks on buses or vans operated by public or private school systems.

Dr. Loughead reported that cases — within HTSD and Allegheny County — have been significantly trending downward in the past few weeks. Along with changes to the CDC's community transmission calculations that currently puts Allegheny County in the "Low" range, the recommendation is for the District to move from universal masking to optional masking in all settings, including transportation, activities, and athletic events beginning on March 1, 2022.

Dr. Loughead expects that some students, staff, and families will continue to mask, and emphasized that the District will support each individual's choice. He believes that the HTSD school community will continue to treat one another with dignity and respect throughout this transition.

Dr. Loughead went on to explain that under the plan being proposed tonight, parents would be asked to continue to contact the school nurse or complete District electronic forms if a student is positive for COVID-19. Dr. Loughead said this cooperation that occurred all school year needs to continue so that the District can respond appropriately to positive cases.

Additionally, students and staff returning to school or work after testing positive for COVID-19 can return after five days and wear a mask on days 6-10 per the CDC's shortened isolation protocol. If the individual prefers not to mask, a 10-day isolation is required. During that time, Zoom access to classroom instruction (as it has in the past) will be available to only those students who are isolating at home due to a positive COVID-19 test.

Further, Dr. Loughead said the District realizes that contact tracing under an optional masking policy presents significant challenges. For example, a single positive case during the school day at the high school could result in hundreds of exposed students. Currently, ACHD is unable to provide the District with contact tracing assistance. Additionally, the District does not have clear guidelines for contact tracing under an optional masking policy. While ACHD would like for contact tracing in schools to continue, Dr. Loughead said the District would face a number of variables thus lengthening the amount of time it would take to notify families of an exposure. Therefore, the District will no longer conduct contact tracing under the optional masking protocol. Parents may voluntarily quarantine their children based on close contact outside of school.

Under the proposed plan, if a student is displaying symptoms of COVID-19, they may be asked to wear a mask in the nurse's office and may be sent home due to symptoms. Dr. Loughead noted that the District's school nurses have been incredibly supportive throughout the pandemic. He believes this is a prudent step to take as the District evaluates positive COVID-19 symptoms when making a decision about sending a student home.

Dr. Loughead reported that, under the proposed plan, Zoom access to classroom instruction will be available only to those students who are isolating at home due to a positive COVID-19 test. He said the District wants to support students with a positive case and provide them with Zoom access so they can stay home, recover, and come back to school healthy. He said the District has been offering Zoom for a while now, and it remains difficult to provide that service with quality and fidelity for students.

Finally, under the proposed plan, the District will revisit the Health and Safety Plan should the CDC county transmission level reach "High" for two consecutive weeks. While Dr. Lougehah does not anticipate reaching a "High" level, he acknowledged that predicting this pandemic has been nearly impossible. The reason for this proposal is that the 7-day rolling average on the ACHD website has a lag time. A two-week period would provide more clear and accurate data needed for making any significant changes to the District's protocol.

Dr. Loughead noted that the District, including its leadership team, principals, and teacher leaders have carefully considered these changes over the past few weeks, in addition to consultations with ACHD officials. The District believes these actions are appropriate and prudent steps to take at this

time in response to the changing conditions over the past 2-3 weeks and changes to CDC guidelines for masking indoors.

Board Comments and Discussion

Mr. Wesley asked Dr. Loughead if the District will ensure that students who chose to continue wearing masks will not be bullied. Dr. Loughead said he has spoken with several superintendents in the region at mask-optional schools. Many students and staff continue to wear masks. He said the District fully expects that some students and staff will continue to wear masks, and those students deserve respect. The District will continue to support students appropriately as it has done in the past.

Mr. Wesley agreed and stated that the District previously would not allow bullying of students with a medical exemption who were not wearing a mask, and now the District would not allow bullying of students who would continue to wear a mask after the updated plan was in effect.

Ms. Hamlin thanked Dr. Loughead and his team for quickly responding to the new guidelines from the CDC on Friday, February 25. She thanked him and his staff for being prepared to present on the proposed Health and Safety Plan changes this evening.

Dr. Loughead noted that everyone worked carefully through this decision, and the District was responsive to the new guidance. He reminded everyone that the pandemic is still ongoing, and some community members will continue to be concerned about family members at home. He said the District recognizes that and wanted to make this decision carefully. Last, he said ACHD officials support school districts making changes to their masking protocols based on the new guidelines.

Public Comment

21:45

A community member thanked the Board and noted that the proposed changes are a positive movement. He also thanked the CDC for changing the way they calculate transmission rates, which allows the District to transition to a mask optional policy. He said that healthy children have never been at serious risk of COVID-19 throughout the entire pandemic, and that parents should have always had the choice to mask their child or not.

22:40

A community member said she is thrilled the District is moving in this direction so children can breathe fresh air. She apologized for not having come across as appreciative of the Board in the past. She recognized the work they do as volunteers. A resident of Hampton for 42 years, she stated that she, as a parent, decided to stand up and protect the rights afforded to them under the Constitution because we live in a constitutional republic. She also spoke of the importance of protecting individual freedoms.

Action Items

Ms. Hamlin recommended and the Board unanimously approved the updated HTSD School Health and Safety Plan effective March 1, 2022.

Adjournment

(27:05)

Mr. Wesley adjourned the meeting.