

Board of Education Special Meeting
Held Remotely Via Zoom
February 17, 2022

Call to Order

Board Chair Sattan called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

Present: Board members Terry Antrum, Tracy Cloyd, Jamie Drzyzga, Melissa Finnigan, Brian Fry, Glenn Gazdik, Scott Lingenfelter, James Mol and Maureen Sattan; and Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel; Assistant Superintendent Michelle Zawawi, and Business Manager Bill Hoff

Absent: None

Board Chair Sattan said it has been a challenging few years for the district and she thinks the work of the Board and the work of the district has been considerate and thoughtful. A safe and methodical approach to unmasking students has been developed and the situation will continue to be monitored. She thanked the community for the trust that they have shown.

Discussion Item

- Discussion of Expiration of Executive Order No. 13A

Superintendent Van Tassel began by thanking all Board members and the community for their continued support. He said the district is taking another significant step toward normalcy by moving to voluntary masking within the schools. He went through a pandemic timeline and gave reassurance that the district is keeping schools as safe and welcoming as possible. He then began his presentation as it relates to Executive Order 13A. Superintendent Van Tassel presented case rate history of the county and town, Suffield Public Schools' positive case trends, SPS COVID-19 testing statistics, COVID-19 hospitalizations, vaccination data, prevention strategies, student and staff quarantine protocols and considerations for operation decision making.

Public Comment

Jeff Davis, 8 Wisteria Lane, said he supports the BOE's decision to unmask the students.

Janet Davis, 8 Wisteria Lane, said she supports the BOE's decision to unmask the students. She said to put the students back to normal and that student separation is nonsense.

Tod and Janet Policandriotes, 1467 East Street N, said they are in agreement with the BOE's decision and asked if natural immunity would be recognized. Superintendent Van Tassel said the overall message is that we believe we are in a safe place based on the metrics we have.

Patricia Hill, 55 Lebria Road, said she is not anti-mask but her child will still wear a mask to school. She asked if busses would be delayed because some children will not remember their masks. Business Manager Bill Hoff said bus drivers will have a supply of masks on the bus for those who may need one.

Denise Bachiochi, 19 Kate Way, said she agrees with the BOE's decision and said she would like to eliminate the social distancing and other measures that are going to be put in place. She said the children have gone through enough. She said certain educators are imposing personal viewpoints onto the students regarding mask wearing and she said that should not be happening. Superintendent Van Tassel said a meeting has been scheduled with faculty and staff and that he

will share with them that masking is not at their discretion. He said if there are circumstances where that is occurring, parents should contact school administration.

Andrea Kwaczala, 396 Hickory Street, thanked the BOE and Principal Olearczyk. She said her family is pro mask and that she has unvaccinated children at home. She said a lot of pressure is put on our young students. She would like the district to provide training and to have conversations around respecting those who choose to wear a mask.

Julianne Williams, 1870 North Street, asked if there would be changes to access remote learning for people who may need it. Superintendent Van Tassel said that Suffield Public Schools does not have the authority to provide remote learning to anyone other than school designated quarantines or isolations related to positive cases.

Michelle, last name and address not stated, asked if the BOE had an agreement should case numbers go up. She asked if protocols would be changed. Superintendent Van Tassel said that if the district starts to see a spike, consultation with health officials and further consideration may occur.

Amanda Trelease, 3 Williams Circle, asked if immunocompromised children could attend school remotely. Superintendent Van Tassel said access to lesson materials would be in packet form.

Libby Begin, 50 Cross Street, thanked the BOE and Principal Olearczyk. She said she agreed with Andrea Kwaczala on supporting children who choose to wear masks. She said her family is pro mask and that she has children who are too young to be vaccinated. She said we need to support children who choose to wear masks and make them feel comfortable with their decision. She asked how attendance would be recorded for children who receive materials in packet form. Superintendent Van Tassel said parents should contact school administrators directly regarding attendance questions.

Board Chair Sattan stated that public comment at Board of Education meetings typically does not allow for a question/answer format. Flexibility was granted in this case due to the mask policy change and recognizing Superintendent Van Tassel's previous COVID-19 parent meetings allowed for the questions and answers.

Discussion/Action Items

- Discussion and Possible Action on Series C-19 Concerning Use of Face Coverings in School

MOTION #22-41: Glenn Gazdik moved to approve the request to eliminate Policy Series C-19 Concerning Use of Face Coverings in School on February 28th. Scott Lingenfelter seconded the motion. Board Chair Sattan called for Board member discussion.

Board members discussed the face coverings policy in light of the information Superintendent Van Tassel presented. They encouraged vaccinations, stressed the importance of respecting other's decisions on whether to wear a mask or not, expressed a desire to support the

social/emotional issues of students and use this opportunity to teach lessons of respecting other's choices. Many Board members expressed support of mask choice and several asked that the mitigation measures be as limited as possible. Board members asked about the input of Dr. Segool, the district's medical adviser, and asked that the community model behavior regarding respect for individual choices, not leaving it solely to the teachers. Superintendent Van Tasel said, with all the complexities, he would not speak for Dr. Segool or Patrice Sulik. He stated that, as health professionals, they weigh circumstances with degrees of risk. They were consulted and are aware of the district plan.

Due to technical connection difficulties, Brian Fry left the meeting at approximately 7:35.

Board Chair Sattan restated Motion #22-41 and called for a vote. All present Board members voted yes. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Adjournment

Scott Lingenfelter moved, James Mol seconded to adjourn the meeting at 7:41 p.m. All members voted in favor.

Click here to view the meeting: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-mpVfauohaGEBp6AJkQLGQxOEY6BwQ98/view?usp=sharing>

Minutes are subject to approval at the regular meeting of March 7, 2022.

Respectfully submitted,

Jamie Drzyzga
Secretary