

Farouk Rajab, Board Chairman called the special meeting to order at 6:00p.m in the Stonington High School auditorium. Members present were Heidi Simmons, Secretary, Craig Esposito, Daniel Kelley, Kevin Agnello, Christopher Donahue and Sara Baker. Also present were Ana de Oliveira, Recording Secretary, Dr. Van Riley, Superintendent of Schools, and Student Government Representative Kyle Lowry.

### **Comments from Citizens Regarding Items on the Agenda**

AJ Massengale commented on mask mandates, individual choice and the science behind masks. Would like to hand the decision on masking back to the parents.

Jared Riley comment asked for mask choice and to vote yes for mask choice.

Jad Ludinacci commented wants masks removed and spoke it is time for the Board to do what is right for the children.

Payton Stone commented feels it is her choice, it is a distraction, hard to learn, forgetting what friends faces are like. It is hard to breathe when playing sports, masks ruining middle school experience and her childhood.

Devney Worsdale comment on Connecticut Code of Professional Responsibilities for administration and teachers. She also commented on events that students did not attend due to non-vaccinated students, and spoke against masks.

Peyton Quinlan commented masks should be a choice. She spoke of how uncomfortable it is to wear masks while doing sports and not being able to see friends faces. She spoke about not having field trips for a few years. She added everyone should have a choice of wearing masks.

Sergio de Oliveira commented he respects and hears everyone's concerns but believes masks are important in school to keep students safe, because only thing in schools to reduce the transmission and risk of COVID-19. As a junior he has not experienced many things this year due to COVID-19 and is looking forward to prom and would not want to not have prom and miss out because the masks are taken away. As cases increase so would student and staff absences and this would make the district move backwards instead of forward in this battle for normalcy.

Pyper Quinlan spoke she did not want to wear masks because it steams up glasses and it is hard to breathe, and we need freedom.

Kelly Riley spoke about kids how they felt about masks saying they are hard to breathe and to hear teachers. She asked the Board to give mask choice for our children.

Katie Quinlan spoke she supports schools, administrators, teachers and students. She supports schools and respects views. Spoke of the side effects, depression, and suicides. Asked the Board for mask choice and does not feel it is schools responsibility to have masks or not. She spoke about a petition with 521 signatures regarding masks.(attached)

Pantea Umrysz pleaded for masking to be a choice. She spoke on the data and that children are at the least risk, the negative impact on children, and speech in students. She commented on CDC updated guidance. She stated masks protect the wearer and wants families and staff to make their own decisions.

Jody Ludinacci commented forcing children to wear masks is child abuse. She spoke of her own student and the need for speech therapy. She noted families should have the choice to wear masks or not. She commented wants masks to be optional. Her daughter Natalia commented masks make her upset and wants to see families and teachers with their full face. She doesn't want to wear masks wants to make her own choices not anyone else.

Jenni Adkins commented on allowing mask choice. She commented about policies across the district being different at each school. She asked the Board to do what is right and give them a choice.

Jen Evering spoke she has been speaking against masks for over a year. She commented on what the Board has done regarding masks. She commented about the mental health crisis due to masks. She stated kids need to go back to normal, no social distances and no vaccine requirements. She commented wants mask choice now and noted her kids will be mask free come February 28th.

Lisa Hoagland commented about the recent events during the middle school concert involving her son and how the incident was handled. She added we need to unmask or give them the option.

Audra Hull spoke about the middle school incident, wants teacher held accountable. She spoke about how her student reacts when she is able to sit next to someone. Would like the Board to do what is best for the children and would like mask choice.

Caitlin Wheeler thanked the Board and understands it is hard to make decisions for a large organization and understands parents' concerns. She spoke she would like mask choice implemented on February 28th.

Cassie McGrady and Danny Davis spoke about the past years with COVID and all the issues that have been had with school events and the day to day issues. She commented she would like to have masks removed. She commented on masks on bus rides and the amount of time her student needs to wear a mask each day.

Tom Umrysz spoke about personal events that happened that were out of his hands and added wearing masks is now in his hands.

Nick Tewell spoke on the timeline of when the COVID-19 issue started and the events that students missed out on due to COVID-19. He commented on the rate of positive cases in the district, spoke on the hybrid model that was used in 2020, and implementation of masks in schools. He stated he would like the Board to allow parent choice whether masks should be worn or not.

Ali Souza spoke of the clinical data behind masks, number of rising suicides, and depression. She commented on students using dirty masks and her personal situation with regards to the use of masks in school. She commented there must always be a choice.

Jackie Lagasse spoke about each person's role in the community. Spoke of children not improving because of masks, and wants to move to remove the mask mandates in the school and make it a choice. She is in favor of making a parent choice.

Ashley Tewell spoke that her sons last normal day of school was kindergarten. She commented on issues that her son has developed due to masks. She commented on mask policies, number of hours children are in school with masks, how effective cloth masks are. She voiced she wants the Board to vote for mask choice. Her son spoke saying masks should be up to them. He spoke about mask breaks, how much time masks are worn on bus rides and urged the Board to allow children on February 28<sup>th</sup> to walk into school with no mask.