

Waterbury Board of Education

Policy and Legislation committee Meeting

2/15/22

Called to Order: 5:31 pm Elizabeth Brown

Members Present: Commissioner Orso, Commissioner Nardozzi, Commissioner Juanita Hernandez, Commissioner Brown. Commissioner Ireland

Staff Present: Superintendent Ruffin, Attorney Shaw, Asst. Superintendent Darren Schwartz, Belen Michelis

Others: Mayor O'Leary, and one caller, Karen Harvey, Aisling McGuckin (Waterbury Health District)

Darren Schwartz presented the staff, student, and parent survey regarding the COVID-19 virus taken during Feb 11-17th

2782 participants -63% to keep masks in place during school

Student results- 65% yes to masks, 72% would wear if there were a choice

Staff -1020 participants- 61% no mandate for masks, 54% would not wear if optional.

Mayor O'Leary question why the response rate was so low., why was it not released through the media, media coverage gives voice to survey. Questioned whether there were repeat answers

Commissioner Brown questioned if this was for stakeholders, how are we using this data.

Attorney Shaw elaborated on the pending mandate lift from the Governor, explaining, if the board does not act, there will be nothing in place. There would need to be a policy in place.

Aisling McGuckin covered the three requirements to lift mask mandates, Universal masking, vaccine prevalence, low rates in the community. Meeting two would allow Education dept to lift mandate. Requested continued weekly testing, encouraging vaccination and boosters. Ages 12-17 now eligible for booster, vaccination rate should be closer to 80% which is 2 doses of mRNA vaccine. Community rates as of 2/11/22 were 7.99%, Waterbury positivity rates were at 11.8%, not under the suggested 10% threshold. Waterbury case rates 47.4/100,000, WHD could not recommend lifting the mask mandate at this time as two requirements have not been met. Encourages sharing of data, parents getting children vaccinated, encourage screening and for parents to be informed.

Question was asked about not requiring masks in the community, but yes to in school, how do we respond?

Commissioner Orso asked if 2/3 requirements were met, could we then lift the mandate or revisit lifting mandate? Suggested the revised policy provide options

Commissioner Serrano-Adorno: Can we make mask adjustments? Different types of masks? Face Shield defectiveness for teachers?

Commissioner Hernandez: What is the WTA and SAC union position? There is no formal position. Can we protect students with underlying health issues? Reply from McGuckin; those parents need to inform school their child is required to wear a mask. If it is mask optional, how do we address bullying for students required to wear a mask? The district is still under federal mandate of public transportation (school buses).

How many children in the district are too young for the vaccine? (5 years of age or younger) Approx. 942 students district wide in PreK 3&4.

Are we also maintaining social distancing? Dr Ruffin replied we have not been able to meet that mandate since we returned to in-person learning. Students are not 6' apart.

Commissioner Nardozzi inquired about the drop in rates with adequate ventilation or open windows? McGuckin stated that may change the rates at that time.

Mayor O'Leary made suggestions that other towns have looked at both sides. Requested the WHD release weekly memo with current data. Looking at what the state BOE and State Dept of Health are going to do once numbers reach a safe level. Suggested revisiting on weekly basis, with anticipation of that safe level by late March or April 2022. Suggested that if the WTBY BOE does nothing the mask mandate will expire.

Commissioner Brown advised to look at upholding a COVID-19 temporary policy, suggested if public health repeals policy, the BOE could remove it. Commissioner Brown makes motion to create a temporary policy for retaining the mask mandate as revised, and send to full board at regular meeting 3/17/22.

Unanimous vote by all BOE commissioners (Serrano-Adorno, Orso, Nardozzi, Ireland, Hernandez) in attendance.

Meeting adjourned at 6:30 pm.