

The Lowellville Board of Education met in special session on Monday, August 16, 2021 in person in the Cafeteria; President Stephanie Yon presiding. Mrs. Yon called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Stephanie Yon – Present Gerald Dubos - Present
 Michael Palumbo - Present Joseph Sturm - Present
 Brian Wharry – Present

President's Report:

Mrs. Yon read an email that called for the special meeting "Please schedule a Special Board Meeting to take place on Monday, August 16, 2021 at 6:30 pm in the cafeteria. All 5 Board members are interested and able to attend. Subject/Purpose: Discuss the Superintendent's recommendation to start the school year wearing masks and other safety protocols, plans and procedures pertaining to the start-up of the 2021-2022 school year-including the education and transportation of students and their participation in extracurriculars/clubs. I'm not sure how it should be worded. I just want to make sure it's posted correctly and in a timely manner so the public has notice." Mrs. Yon noted there would be a public comment portion of the meeting and then handed it over to Dr. Thomas.

Dr. Thomas welcomed everyone to the meeting. He gave an overview of what has occurred over the past year, noting that Governor DeWine lifted the mask mandate in June 2021, after classes ended for our District. Since classes already ended, it did not impact the district until the summer programs began where we continued with the Governors decision for no mask mandates. Recently, the district reviewed recommendations from the CDC, local and state health boards, and the AAP along with meeting with the Transition Task Force to discuss these recommendations. Various stipulations were discussed such as elimination of desk tents, elimination of cafeteria barriers, consolidating back to one cafeteria, review of the new quarantine recommended guidelines, and the goal of maintaining in-person learning unless medical clearance requires online. The Task Force met on August 10th and there was a consensus for 2 main goals of keeping everyone in the district safe and in-person learning. Dr. Thomas explained how unfortunately, Senate Bill 22 forbid blanket health mandates which is why health departments are only recommending instead of mandating. Dr. Thomas noted how personal beliefs are being set aside with this decision and how the district is looking at expert recommendations. Masks are not a failsafe, but they help.

Mr. Palumbo asked that since the CDC mandated masks for public transit if they could also mandate it in schools. Dr. Thomas said he did not have a definitive answer to that, but Ohio is unable to due to SB 22. He also noted that state universities other than YSU are requiring masks. Mrs. Yon noted that Governor DeWine lifted the mask mandate on June 3rd. Dr. Thomas requested for everyone to read the quarantine guidelines and noted that according to it, masks keep kids in school and in extracurriculars. Masks were mandated all last year without issue. He stated that he understands it is political and everyone has their opinions, but without masks they would be following those quarantine procedures. Mr. Sturm questioned at what point and what data will be used when to determine to lift a mask requirement. Dr. Thomas was unsure and noted that it depends on what data is available and if any benchmarks form. He noted that the delta variant impacts kids but does not currently have a benchmark. Mr. Dubos mentioned that the Ohio Department of Health posts biweekly updates and that there has been a minimal uptick in Mahoning County. He went on to question how many Mahoning County schools will be requiring masks. Dr. Thomas informed everyone that currently Youngstown City, Girard, and Warren City are requiring them. Mr. Dubos noted that only 1 of those schools is in Mahoning County and asked that after all his superintendent meetings, the administration wants to require masks. Dr. Thomas answered, yes and that the ESC is considering it. Mr. Sturm asked if those districts were doing anything differently. Dr. Thomas responded no. Mr. Dubos inquired about what other superintendents have said. Dr. Thomas said there were a variety of comments but overall, it has just been a tough decision put on school districts. Mr. Palumbo then asked

if the quarantine guidelines were mandated or recommended. Dr. Thomas responded recommended. Mr. Dubos questioned that there were 10-14 people on the Transition Task Force. Dr. Thomas confirmed. Mr. Palumbo asked if there were any medical experts on the task force. Dr. Thomas said Brian Wharry was on it. Mr. Wharry stated that the safest option would be to wear masks, as a Board member the easiest decision would be to make it optional, but the decision needs to be what is best for everyone. Dr. Thomas informed everyone that he personally does not wear masks. Everything the district has done since the mask mandate was lifted, such as Summer Boot Camp, has been optional. However, kids must come to school which makes the decision harder. Mr. Wharry stated that the main point is that this is a guideline. Mrs. Yon noted that she asked to be on the task force. There were 14 people on it, but only a few provided their opinion on masks. She stated that she believes this is a superintendent's decisions and she also does not understand why there were no safety measures throughout the summer. Dr. Thomas agreed that she did not provide her opinion on the task force. He also noted that team leadership is part of the policy at the school. He went on to reiterate that changes took place over summer. The Governor lifted the mask mandate and now recommendations for masks are starting to come out. Mrs. Yon responded this is his decision to make as superintendent, not a Board decision. She wants to follow best practices, make sure everyone is on the same page and has the same information. Dr. Thomas noted that he laid out all his information and data to the Board already. Mr. Dubos questioned that the task force was able to extrapolate all that information over their 2 meetings and make a decision. Dr. Thomas said that was one aspect of the decision process. Mrs. Yon noted that was what she was trying to get across.

Mr. Sturm asked about a teacher's poll. Lucy Bartlett answered that it was an email to survey the teachers. She stated in the email that she was on the task force and asked if there were any concerns the teachers wanted addressed. The only responses she received were teachers in favor of wearing masks and she assumed teachers who did not respond did not have a preference. She also noted that Mr. Wharry had an eloquent response in the task force meeting in support of masks. Mr. Dubos asked how many teachers responded. Mrs. Bartlett did not want to disclose as it was private union business. Mr. Dubos followed up asking if she's comfortable saying that represents all teachers. Mrs. Bartlett answered, the ones that responded. Dr. Thomas stated that it is just one more layer of protection. Mr. Dubos noted that he understood but is about data points. He asked if all workers were polled or if there were additional teachers on the task force. Dr. Thomas said Laraine Matisi and Angie Killingsworth were on the task force. Mr. Sturm asked if this was an actual poll. Mrs. Bartlett answered no, she just asked for questions. Mrs. Bartlett then asked what the point of the task force was if their recommendation is not being taken. Mrs. Yon said to ask Dr. Thomas that. Dr. Thomas said again that there is policy for shared leadership, hence the task force. Mrs. Yon stated that she wanted information for the Board and poll information. She stated that the Board is accountable to the community and needed answers to any questions. Mrs. Yon again questioned why there were no safety measures over the summer. Dr. Thomas stated that he already explained that on June 3rd the mask mandate was lifted and now health organizations are recommended masks. He also noted an email he sent to the Board on August 11th with additional information regarding masks. Mrs. Yon retorted that people were still in the building after that email without safety measures. Dr. Thomas stated that those were smaller groups and voluntary.

Mrs. Yon then opened the meeting for public comment.

Beth Gibson – Questioned whether the Board and administration are working in the same system. She asked how the community was supposed to come together and support the district when it seems the district is not supporting itself.

Julie DiLoreto – Stated that the goal as a teaching staff and of the Board is to make it a good year for everyone as a team. Whatever you decide, we will all follow and support. Not everyone will be happy, but the goal is to keep everyone safe. It is your decision and do what is best for us and the community.

Lucy Bartlett – Stated that last year, everyone was put out due to keeping kids at home. This year we can have every here and having things mostly normal, but with masks. The community needs to trust the school

to make the right decision and keep kids safe. She cannot imagine losing one of these students and masks will help avoid that. She referenced an article that came out stating local health departments support in-person learning and recommend masks. Mr. Dubos questioned that nine out of ten schools are going against a mask mandate, and she is going to go off the credibility of an article. Mrs. Bartlett said yes, she guesses she will believe an article stating the local health departments recommendation. She also noted that situations are fluid, and the district will need to be as well.

Craig Kumer – Asked what the criteria is for re-evaluating masks and when will the re-evaluation take place. He also questioned the circumstance of a child that already had COVID and has antibodies. Dr. Thomas began to answer when Mrs. Yon stepped in to remind everyone that this was public comment only and the Board/Administration can provide insights after public comment if desired.

Don Sudon – Stated the decision is being taken out of the community's hands. What is safe is his kid being able to see others. He stated that numbers are showing kids are not getting the virus. He also stated his displeasure with Lucy not sharing her staff numbers, especially to the taxpayers.

Chris Crilley – Stated that he heard a lot of numbers and data. Proceeded to read of enrollment numbers and said enrollment is declining. He stated that it is not the Board's fault. He mentioned prior Board meetings that lead to his kids being robbed of an education and an illegal meeting held last August. He also complained that last year kids were taken out of school put sports continued because sports are put first. He finally noted that there was another Board meeting in February that was changed from in-person to remote which was an illegal meeting as well.

Sarah McCaughtry – Noted that the district talked about data from the CDC but wanted to know if there was any data on Lowellville in particular.

Jennifer Lane – Noted that she appreciates Dr. Thomas and the district, but online learning does not work. There should be a check and balance for decisions. Teachers and parents both need to be respected. She also noted that Lowellville has a small building which makes distancing difficult in some instances.

Jennifer Johnson – Stated that she respects everyone's opinion and going off recommendations. She also mentioned spacing issues and suggested use of barriers in place of a mask mandate. She noted to make sure people are aware of consequences of having no masks as you cannot throw out all guidelines. Not having a mask could result in quarantine and everyone needs to understand their decision.

Jeannine Reamer – Stated she had some confusion with the task force. Noted that Lucy was asked to be on it and as a courtesy, asked teachers for any concerns. This recommendation was part of a whole and the decision is not made just on them. She stated that the teachers are not forcing a decision and Lucy, again, was doing it as a courtesy. She then asked the Board if they want task force meetings to continue because it does not seem like they do. She also noted that if they do not want them, then they should stop encouraging them.

Kim Swanson – Stated that she has 4 kids, 3 of which are very active. She stated that masks will not stop the germs and has concerns regarding kids with asthma.

Lucy Bartlett – Noted that the district should be looking for a way to keep kids safest in school. This is not the same as last year. The delta variant is different, and this is not just a Lowellville issue.

Chris Crilley – Stated that he believes Lucy's comment on the delta variant is an opinion. Noted his doctor informed him that masks do not make a significant difference and recommends no masks. He also wanted to know why the Board was not voting on a policy.

Sarah McCaughtry – Noted that the district should focus on Lowellville and data relevant to Lowellville.

Don Sudon – Also noted that Lucy’s statement on masks was just an opinion on not everyone’s belief. He also questioned the 14 people on the task force and whether the community voted for those people to make this type of decision.

Mrs. Yon announced the end of the public comment portion of the meeting.

Mr. Wharry noted that the transition task force decision was just a recommendation. He has been back and forth on what is best and determined the risk is not that much higher. The district needs to be able to pivot and adjust but is not in a current position for a mask mandate. Mr. Sturm agreed and added that criteria is needed for the decision. Mr. Wharry stated that they need to formulate criteria, evaluate day to day, and pivot if there is an outbreak. But do not start with a mask mandate. Mr. Palumbo added that he has been teaching for 13 years, some of which was in Youngstown, and Lowellville should not be following Youngstown. He noted that nobody here is an expert on masks, but parents are experts on their own kids. He added that in education, you do not want to be the first to do something and that the CDC could still come out with a mask mandate if they wanted to.

Mrs. Yon transitioned to discuss other school startup plans. Dr. Thomas added that he’s talked to a lot of people and there is no right or wrong answer. He noted that typically it takes 2 years for a baseline data. The administration has wrestled with the decision and whatever they ultimately decide, they want to thank this group for coming out and sharing their opinions. Decisions need to be made and we need to be flexible. He stated that the administration would take another look at all the guidelines and get more definitive answers on some issues. He also noted that there is no vote required for this due to it not being a Board policy and that the decision will likely change based on data. Mrs. Yon mentioned the need to create baselines and benchmarks. Dr. Thomas stated that they are doing their due diligence. Mrs. Yon inquired about masks on transportation. Dr. Thomas said yes, that is still in the law. Mrs. Yon inquired about masks at sporting events. Dr. Thomas noted that OHSAA dictates that. Mrs. Yon asked about what they said regarding masks. Mr. Sammartino stated that they recommend masks.

Mrs. Yon then handed it over to Mrs. Parry. Mrs. Parry gave an overview of the start of school procedures that have been sent out to parents and students. Dr. Thomas also noted that Mrs. Parry and Mr. Sammartino wrote a welcome letter. Mrs. Yon asked about parents that cannot make it to open house. Mrs. Parry informed everyone that teachers are understanding, and they should contact the school to bring stuff in over the coming days. Mrs. Yon then asked about school supplies. Mrs. Parry noted that they were listed on the main page of the school website.

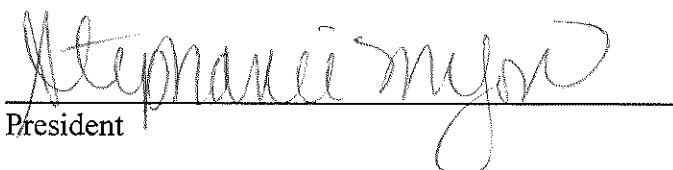
Mrs. Yon thanked everyone for attending. Dr. Thomas added that if there are any questions, they could call him.

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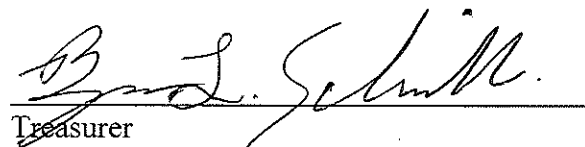
1. Adjournment:

Brian Wharry moved to adjourn at 8:01 pm. Seconded by Stephanie Yon.

ROLL CALL: Yon - Dubos - Palumbo - Sturm - Wharry - All Aye.
Stephanie Yon declared motion carried 5-0.



President



Treasurer