



USD 232 Board of Education
Official Minutes – Special Meeting

February 18, 2022

The meeting was conducted virtually via Zoom and live streamed to the district's YouTube channel.
<https://bitly.com/usd232youtube>

President, Mrs. Danielle Heikes called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. A quorum of the Board was present. Board members and administrators present were as follows:

Board Members: Rick Amos
Bill Fletcher
Danielle Heikes
Brandi Jonasson
Stephanie Makalous
Calley Malloy
Ashley Spaulding

Administrators: Alvie Cater, Assistant Superintendent of Administration & Communications
Wendy Denham, Board Clerk/Executive Assistant to the Superintendent
Dr. Frank Harwood, Superintendent

President Heikes said the Johnson County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) rescinded its public health order requiring masks for grades K-6 at a meeting on Thursday, February 17. She said USD 232 board members took action in December 2021 requiring masks in preschool, elementary and middle school buildings in accordance with the Johnson County Public Health Order.

Superintendent Harwood shared the following PowerPoint slides with the Board:

- Current USD 232 Mask Requirements – This includes actions taken by USD 232 board members in October 2021 and December 2021 and the BOCC on February 17, 2022. Superintendent Harwood said as of the week of February 14, 2022, all USD 232 buildings have met the 2% threshold for two consecutive weeks. Under current protocols, barrier face masks will be optional at all USD 232 buildings when students return to class on February 22nd. He said students will still be required to wear masks on buses due to federal regulations. He also shared that individuals who test positive for COVID-19 will have to be out of school for five days and then can return to class for days 6-10 with daily testing and masks on, according to the shortened isolation period.

- USD 232 Cases by Building – This is COVID-19 student cases broken down by school building for the weeks of 1/22/22 through 2/16/22. It shows a significant decrease in the number of recommended isolations and quarantines, with 147 isolations/70 quarantines for the week of January 22nd and 17 isolations/10 quarantines for the week of February 12th.
- Absences – COVID-19 Case Rate Comparison – This is the percentage of isolations, quarantines, total of both, and overall absences for the current school year. It also shows the average absence rate for USD 232 for the five years before 2019-20 is 3.56%. Superintendent Harwood noted that the Johnson County Department of Health & Environment (JCDHE) suspended contact tracing during the first week of January.

Stephanie Makalous said the state has regulations in place to shut down a school if there is a Flu outbreak and asked what the percentage of illness is that would trigger this action. Superintendent Harwood said if there is a higher risk of contracting disease at a school the Health Department may consider shutting it down if the absenteeism goes over ten percent.

Superintendent Harwood said the Kansas Department of Health & Environment (KDHE) and JCDHE work together, but the district reports information to the JCDHE.

President Heikes asked if the district would report on a daily absence rate or weekly absence rate to the Health Department. Superintendent Harwood said the district would start looking at the data daily as absences start to increase, especially if there are absences due to illnesses that may cause concern or those illnesses displaying similar symptoms; when it reaches five percent the district would start thinking about absenteeism and then start talking with JCDHE. At ten percent he said there would be significant conversations about when to consider closing a school.

President Heikes said the Board put in place the four percent threshold for COVID (recommended isolations and quarantines) to keep the district under the ten percent line when the health department is contacted. Superintendent Harwood said that is correct, as a school could have about four percent of students absent for various reasons and another four percent out with COVID, the district could have the opportunity to require masks and avoid the ten percent threshold.

Calley Malloy asked if Dr. Areaola or the Health Department has recommended a threshold specific to USD 232. Superintendent Harwood said they have not.

Ashley Spaulding asked if the district tracks absences for illness versus other reasons like travel or college visits. Superintendent Harwood said the district may not have that level of detail for each absence, but noted that typically the district would have 3.56 percent absenteeism and about 35 percent of those absences would be illness related, which would be about a 1.25 percent absenteeism rate (for the 2018-19 school year). For this year he said the district's absence rate has been around

5.53 percent and 41 percent of absences have been due to illness as reported, with about 2.26 percent ill regularly throughout the year. He said the one week that was really bad, the week of January 8th, the district was at a 10.68 percent absence rate and 78 percent of the absences were reported due to illness.

Brandi Jonasson said the district has the four percent threshold and asked if keeping her children home due to asthma in the spring would count toward that specific threshold. Superintendent Harwood said the four percent threshold that the district currently has in place is only for recommended isolations and quarantines due to COVID, so it would not count against that threshold, but would count if looking at total illnesses.

President Heikes asked Superintendent Harwood if the absenteeism reported was just for students and included preschool data. He said it was just student data and included early childhood.

Brandi Jonasson asked if the Blue Valley and Olathe districts set their percentage at ten percent and eight percent to avoid a mask requirement. Superintendent Harwood said he did not know the rationale behind their decisions, but said Blue Valley's percentage is for illness. He pointed out that if a district is at ten percent illness and has any other absences it would be about 12-13 percent absences, at which point the district would be talking about closing buildings instead of masking.

Rick Amos asked if the Board does nothing today if every school would be mask optional with current numbers, except for Starside Elementary because it was at 2.43 percent the week of February 5-11. Superintendent Harwood said Starside was at 1.99 percent the two weeks prior, and has remained below the four percent threshold. Mr. Amos asked Superintendent Harwood to talk about tracking total absences versus illnesses. Superintendent Harwood said if looking at absence data, the most reliable data are total absences because the district knows when a student is not in class. He said once you get into the reasons reported by parents it gets a little less accurate because it is based on what is reported; parent request, appointments, illness, or even for unknown reasons. He said even when looking at quarantine and isolation data, total absences is most accurate, especially with isolation, because the district knows the reason for the absence if a PCR test is taken as it gets reported through the lab to the county and the state. He said with in-home tests going on now it could be that someone stays home ill and a positive test is not reported. He said total absences would be the most accurate, but does contain reasons other than COVID-related illnesses.

President Heikes asked Superintendent Harwood to pull up the COVID Cases by Building chart. She asked how confident he was that isolations are being reported. Superintendent Harwood said it is still hard to gauge, but quite confident. He said the district was only above four percent when things were really bad and when looking at just isolations. He said the vast majority of families are going to report things accurately.

Stephanie Makalous said she would like to move away from the percentage and remove it from the criteria.

President Heikes said she would hate to move away from a percentage because the district could see a peak again, but also has concern with looking at overall illnesses or absences. If isolations are being reported, and the district has this data, she said she would like to look at keeping the masking rule specific to COVID.

Ashley Spaulding said she would share President Heikes' thoughts since the pandemic remains. She said she does have concerns with kids being out for various reasons, other illnesses, and said she would agree with looking at COVID only and raising the percentage for COVID above four percent, and drop the two percent rule.

Rick Amos said he agrees that the district needs something in place, but is not sure the district is getting true numbers to measure COVID only. He said he is fine with the basis of only COVID, and probably likes it better than total absences. He said he did not want to mask if there is a large percentage out for spring break. He said he would like to find a middle ground with a percentage which the Board and administration are comfortable.

Danielle Heikes said if the Board goes with establishing a percentage for tracking COVID she would like to revisit it before the start of the next school year. She said it is possible there may be a recommendation from the CDC regarding masks.

Stephanie Makalous said she is concerned with picking a number for COVID related illnesses as the district may have lots of people that don't report it accurately.

Bill Fletcher said he agrees with Mrs. Makalous and that masks do not work unless it is an N95 or KN95 mask. He suggested the district do away with the percentage threshold.

Stephanie Makalous said the health department will come in and help the district when illnesses get too high. She said most people in the district have had the opportunity to get vaccinated.

Brandi Jonasson said the district did not have any problem with the four percent threshold before Omicron came out. She said she does not want to set the threshold so high that the district does not have the chance to put students in masks to avoid having a school shut down. She suggested the current percentage threshold needs to be bumped up a bit.

In response to a request made by Calley Malloy, Rick Amos said in looking at the numbers Superintendent Harwood shared, the number he was comfortable with is five percent for COVID-related illnesses and eight percent for total absences, but said he leans toward setting a total absence rate. Mrs. Malloy said she would be comfortable with an eight percent absentee rate which would help to

avoid being in a crisis. Superintendent Harwood said the health department would look at it based on what they believe to be the cause of a high number of absences, for instance if it is a norovirus outbreak a building could be closed for cleaning.

Brandi Jonasson said one of the things she sees is parents saying the district is going to mask for everything and she does not want it to seem like the district is doing this. She suggested with an absentee rate it sends a message to patrons that the district is masking for non-COVID reasons and said it would be best to look at just COVID numbers and trust parents to report accurately.

Danielle Heikes said Shawnee Mission has set a COVID threshold and overall absence rate threshold. She said she believes the vast majority of our families are reporting when an illness occurs. She said USD 232 could do something similar, but it would be complicated.

Superintendent Harwood said for this year there has only been three weeks the district was above five percent for COVID-related absences, the first three weeks of January. Before that, he said there were only four times the district was above one percent. He said if a school got above five percent of COVID absences that would certainly show a high spread.

President Heikes asked if Mr. Amos would be open to looking at COVID/illness absences only or would prefer to look at overall absences. Mr. Amos said he could get on board with setting a percentage that was COVID related, but total absence is more accurate and easier on the administration.

Brandi Jonasson said the majority of parents will report absences. She suggested raising it to five or six percent.

Superintendent Harwood said the district is still required by state law to report isolations or illnesses related to COVID.

Stephanie Makalous said if the district sees the numbers getting high it should let the Health Department deal with it instead of the Board setting a threshold at which they are guessing.

Bill Fletcher said the BOCC removed its mask mandate and will reinstate it if needed so the school board should not set a threshold.

Rick Amos said the Board has Home Rule and can set a threshold.

President Heikes said Dr. Areaola indicated that the Health Department would work with individual school districts on setting a threshold. Superintendent Harwood said discussions have taken place in the past about current thresholds, but not about setting new ones. President Heikes said if the district has another spike she would like to institute a threshold to attempt to mitigate a school closure.

Ashley Spaulding said the vast majority of district patrons do not want to mask, but there are patrons that do not agree with the BOCC action and would like for students to remain in masks. She said the threshold is just a mitigation step to take should something go wrong. She said the Board needs to consider all patrons.

Brandi Jonasson said she agreed with Mrs. Spaulding.

Mr. Rick Amos moved that in USD 232 masks will remain optional beginning 2/22/22 for the remainder of the 2021-22 school year for all grade levels, early childhood through high school, as long as total COVID-related absences remain below five percent. In the event that an individual building exceeds this threshold, that building will temporarily return to masking and will need to return to below the five percent threshold for one consecutive week before returning to optional masking.

Mrs. Brandi Jonasson seconded.

Superintendent Harwood said based on the motion, with COVID-related absences, recommended quarantines would be included in the five percent.

Brandi Jonasson asked about the highest week of absences. Superintendent Harwood said the total that week was 5.84 percent COVID-related absences, 3.62 percent for isolations and 2.2 percent quarantines.

President Heikes asked Rick Amos to reiterate how he arrived at five percent for this motion. He said because the district moved from total absences to COVID related he looked back to September and the district has three weeks that exceeded five percent COVID-related absences, during the spike, and in looking at those weeks they were at 5.75 percent, 5.84 percent and 6.92 percent. Of those weeks there were still buildings that would have remained masks optional because they were below the five percent threshold. He said he took the history of what the district has been doing with isolation and quarantine tracking since the beginning of the school year and, while the district has three weeks above five percent, virtually every other week has been two percent or less.

Ashley Spaulding asked if the Bridge was included in the motion. Superintendent Harwood said it is considered a high school program.

Bill Fletcher asked if someone who is quarantined has COVID. Superintendent Harwood said it is considered COVID related.

Roll Call Vote:

Rick Amos – Yes

Ashley Spaulding – Yes

Stephanie Makalous – No

Calley Malloy – Yes
Brandi Jonasson – Yes
Bill Fletcher – No
Danielle Heikes – Yes

Carried 5/2.

President Heikes repeated the motion and adjourned the meeting at 10:35 a.m.

3/7/2022

Date Approved

Nancy S. Dentham

Clerk, Board of Education

Danielle Heikes

President, Board of Education