

Superintendent Dennis Furton's Statement - Board Meeting of August 16, 2021

Before we get into the Agenda, the Board and the Administration want to make something clear: We don't like masks.

Over the past two months, we have listened to each speaker at the prior Board meetings. Their comments have not gone unheard and have been helpful in driving us all to dig deeper and learn more. However, given how the situation has changed over the past several weeks, we feel requiring masks is the right decision at this time.

How did we get here? The positivity rate in Ottawa County has increased to over 10%, rising rapidly in a short amount of time. The number of cases per 100,000 has risen from 16 in mid-July to over 110 today. These two indicators suggest that things are likely to get worse before they get better.

Are children dying from COVID in Ottawa County? The data says "no". But, children are suffering differently from the Delta variant in other parts of the country and the number of pediatric hospitalizations has risen substantially.

We know we cannot keep masks on forever. Nobody wants this.

So, where do we go from here and what will it take to make masks optional? We need the trend to move the other way.

To this end:

We will continue to monitor the data by viewing community based transmission as per the CDC metric. A Moderate or low Substantial level of transmission, for a sustained period, will allow adjustments to be made.

When students and staff return on the 24th we will have the benefit of tracking district specific case data which will inform future decisions.

The Board will receive updates from the Administration every Tuesday and Thursday, advising on current trends and considerations for change. In truth, we'll be looking at data every day.

The Administration will work with other school districts to monitor what is and what is not working. I meet twice weekly with county superintendents and the OCDPH and will be listening intently to updates from schools who remain mask optional. Just as our experience may inform their decisions, theirs may inform ours.

We will look for every opportunity to safely alter and reduce the mask requirement wherever and whenever we can.

When we experience a sustained, positive trend, next steps may include making masks optional at the high school level first and moving to lower grade levels as appropriate. Intermediate steps may include requiring masks when out of a seat but making them

optional when seated. All mitigation strategies will be evaluated regularly and revised accordingly.

While the decision to vaccinate remains a parent's choice, the district will make sure parents are informed of where and when vaccines are available so that a lack of awareness or access does not create a barrier to choosing to vaccinate their children.

Although we do not all agree on how to get there, I believe everyone in this room would agree that we don't want masks.

You have our commitment to continue to work towards this goal. All we can ask is for your patience and while we try to make the best decision for the entire Spring Lake Public Schools community.