

Ipswich School Committee
Tuesday, February 15, 2022
7:00 PM
MS/HS Guidance Conference Room

MINUTES

- 1) Call to order at 7:00 PM by Mr. Stevens.

Present: Emily Cannon, Kate Eliot, Pav Kneedler, Hugh O'Flynn, Jeff Poirier, Greg Stevens.
Chub Whitten.

- 2) Mission Statement read by Mr. Stevens.
- 3) Citizen's comments:

Karen Alleva (10 Poplar Road) asked when the vaccination rate at the HS reached 80%, and why at that point masks weren't dropped. She states that children were bullied over masks and vaccination status and that the decision to mandate masks was abusive. Hugh reviews how the School Committee can and cannot respond to Citizens' Comments and reminds everyone that the Governor has mandated masks in the schools since the beginning of the school year.

Kim Mavroides (9 Poplar Road) states that she disagrees that mask wearing was abusive. Amanda Orlando states that masks no longer serve any purpose and she supports the governor's dropping of the mask mandate.

Jody Stevens (34 Washington Street) feels that we are hampering children's development by having them wear masks and that they need to be able to see the faces of their teachers and peers. She also says that there has been bullying by students regarding the masks and vaccination status.

Beth Cook (23 Arrowhead Trail) moved here for the schools but hasn't sent her children to school yet because she doesn't support them wearing masks. She cites the mental health crisis among youth and that she believes it is tied to mask wearing and she supports dropping the mandate.

Becky Slawson (IEA President) says that the teachers have been meeting and talking about this, and their opinions are mixed, as are the opinions of the general public. There is a general feeling that perhaps a gradual approach would be best, moving past the week following vacation first before taking masks off. She also mentions the possibility of a new variant and the need to make allowances for future mask wearing.

- 4) Discussion and Vote to Update the Mask Policy

Mr. Stevens agrees with the 2/28 date to end the mask mandate based off the feedback of the public health nurse and school nurses. Ms. Cannon agrees and feels that we don't need the separate MASC policy. Mr. Whitten agrees and suggests that we support the proposed MASC policy. Ms. Eliot agrees with 2/28 to rescind the mandate as well and mentions the testing program for staff and students. Mr. Poirier also supports dropping the mask mandate. Ms. Kneedler has reservations regarding dropping the mask mandate and would prefer to wait until March 7th, the week following school vacation. Dr. O'Flynn is grateful for the great job that people in our community have done through the pandemic and thinks that it is time, too, to drop the mask mandate.

Mr. Whitten makes a motion to follow DESE guidance to end the mask mandate on 2/28 and to adopt the new policy. Ms. Cannon suggests that the two things should be separated.

- *Motion to repeal the mask mandate in Ipswich Public Schools on February 28, 2022 was made by Mr. Whitten and seconded by Dr. O'Flynn. **The motion passed with 6 in favor and 1 not in favor.***

Ms. Cannon says that the first two pieces of the new MASC policy are both state/federally mandated at this time, and that the 3rd point is CDC guidance - do we need a policy? Dr. O'Flynn agrees with this point. Debate and discussion about whether or not a policy is needed.

- *Motion to accept the updated policy EBCFA, to be reviewed by the Policy Subcommittee at their next meeting, was made by Mr. Whitten and seconded by Dr. O'Flynn. **The motion passed with 6 in favor and 1 not in favor.***

5) New Business

There was no new business.

6) Adjournment

- *Motion to adjourn was made by Ms. Kneedler and seconded by Dr. O'Flynn. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

Meeting adjourned at 7:54 PM