



Date Approved/Released: 4/7/2022

Date Approved/Hold: _____

School Committee Chair: [Signature]

School Committee Meeting

February 17, 2022 - 6:00 pm

Town Hall - 2nd Floor Auditorium

1. Call to order

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Attendance:

Larry Murphy, Chair; Ryan Forsythe; Greg Vine; Karen Kast-McBride; Thad King, Superintendent; Mike Barbaro (via telephone)

L. Murphy reads audio visual disclosure.

3. Public Comment:

L. Murphy explains protocol for public comment. Three minutes are allowed to present material. Topics for discussion must be limited to those listed under what is in the meeting agenda for the evening. Improper conduct and remarks will not be allowed. Defamatory or abusive remarks are out of order. If the speaker persists in improper conduct or remarks, the Chair may terminate all the individual's privileges as all remarks will be addressed through the Chair. Speakers may offer such objective criticisms of the school operations and programs that concern them, but in public session, the Committee will not hear complaints of school personnel, nor against any member of the School Committee. Members of the audience are invited to approach and speak into the microphone.

Kevin Nelson approaches and asks that the Committee vote to terminate the mask mandate.

Stephanie Rondeau, president of the Winchendon Teachers' Association, approaches and states that she, along with a majority of the staff at Winchendon Public Schools, do not believe that now is the time to terminate the mask mandate.

Tina Santos approaches and makes note that the Board of Health met Monday and recommended and approved that the mask mandate be lifted in all town buildings, not including the school buildings, since the Committee will be voting on that issue tonight. Miss Santos asks that the Committee also vote to lift the mandate for schools.

Robert Pfitzner approaches and asks that the Committee vote to terminate the mask mandate.

Sarah Williams approaches and asks that the Committee vote to terminate the mask mandate.

Another community member approaches and asks that the Committee vote to terminate the mask mandate.

Rick Ward approaches and asks that the Committee vote to terminate the mask mandate.

L. Murphy thanks the community members for their comments and commends their courage for speaking tonight.

4. Consent Agenda: None

5. Superintendent's Report

a. COVID Update:

T. King gives the current COVID numbers for WPS, indicating a positive change in terms of COVID numbers.

K. Kast-McBride questions whether these numbers are town wide or for students only. T. King replies that the numbers are town wide. He explains that the method for viewing Winchendon students only is not guaranteed to be accurate.

6. New Business:

a. Discussion of Local Mask Requirement:

R. Forsythe makes Motion to lift the local mask requirement dated August 30, 2021 and mirror the position of the Winchendon Board of Health, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Department of Public Health and the Governor's office. With this Motion, it is recognized:

- Masking will not be required in the district as of Monday, February 28, 2022.
- The district will respect individual choice to wear or not to wear masks.
- The Federal mandate for busing remains in effect. Masks are required on all buses.
- The Winchendon Public Schools' approved COVID protocols will remain in effect.
- Masks are still required in the district nurse's office as required by the state Department of Public Health.

Discussion by G. Vine, who asks to amend the Motion as it was presented to include a portion of the suggested motion that was dropped by R. Forsythe, which states that the Winchendon Public Schools continues to strongly encourage individuals to be vaccinated when medically possible. Seconded by K. Kast-McBride.

Discussion by R. Forsythe, who explains that he purposefully left that bullet off because

he believes the Committee has an opportunity to make a change, as it is a point that has been made by the board of health and by this Committee, yet serves to be a flashpoint to the community.

G. Vine replies that he believes the Committee should stay with what it has been doing all along and that having a flashpoint should not be a concern.

L. Murphy calls for vote to amend the original Motion. K. Kast-McBride - Y; G. Vine - Y; R. Forsythe - N; M. Barbaro - Y; L. Murphy - N. Motion passes.

L. Murphy asks for vote for the Motion itself.

Discussion by K. Kast-McBride and M. Barbaro regarding the drop in numbers. G. Vine agrees that this is not an easy vote for any of the members to make; yet, every decision the Committee has made was believed to be the best interest of the district and the students and staff in the district. R. Forsythe replies that this district and most in Massachusetts have been extremely cautious and have kept the protocols, but he believes that those actions have run their course. He believes it is time for the schools to follow not only public opinion and action but also science, which has said to lift the mask mandate. K. Kast-McBride responds that she agrees with R. Forsythe, that it is time to get back to a more normal state of affairs.

G. Vine asks if making this vote could limit the Committee in the future if numbers started to increase. T. King responds that it would not limit them from what could be done in the future if numbers were to skyrocket. The Committee could vote once and again to reimpose the mask mandate. G. Vine states that he will continue to encourage people to get vaccinated.

L. Murphy asks for rollcall vote. R. Forsythe - Y; G. Vine - Y; K. Kast-McBride - N; M. Barbaro - N; L. Murphy - Y.

b. School Committee Meeting Frequency:

G. Vine makes Motion to table this topic. Seconded by K. Kast-McBride. Vote is unanimous.

7. Old Business: None

8. Future Agenda Items:

R. Forsythe asks to add a discussion about voting on multiple representatives to subcommittees to potentially identify alternates in addition to the two members.

9. School Committee Closing Comments:

G. Vine thanks everyone who came out to speak.

K. Kast-McBride encourages everyone to attend the musical. She thanks the gentleman who spoke regarding his mother or grandmother.

10. Adjournment:

G. Vine makes Motion to adjourn. Seconded by K. Kast-McBride. Vote is unanimous. Meeting is adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted: Liz Latoria
Liz Latoria, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent

Documents Attached: None