

**CHELMSFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
MEETING  
February 17, 2022  
Meeting Minutes**

**Members Present:** Mr. Dennis King (Chair), Mr. Jeff Doherty (Secretary), Mr. John Moses, Ms. Donna Newcomb and Ms. Maria Santos.

**Also present:** Dr. Linda Hirsch (Assistant Superintendent), Ms. Joanna Johnson-Collins (Director of Business and Finance) and Ms. Peggy Gump, (Director of Nursing Services)

**Call to Order**

6:00 p.m.

**Pledge of Allegiance**

**Chair Opening Statement**

“Tonight’s meeting is being live-streamed by Chelmsford Telemedia and posted to the CPS website for interested community members to access and watch. In-person public participation will be taking place tonight in accordance with social distancing and safety protocols established by the Chelmsford School Committee Public Participation Guidelines. Anyone interested in speaking during the public input portion of the meeting would have notified the superintendent’s office by yesterday afternoon and would have been provided with the guidelines and assigned a time to attend the meeting to speak. If anyone watching this meeting live has questions or comments to share they are encouraged to email one of us during the meeting. We will read their comments or questions during our second public input session at the end of the meeting.”

**Public Comments**

Linda Moran, of 112 Westford Street, spoke of her concern for students wearing masks in the CPS. She expressed many instances where she felt mask wearing was especially having an impact on the mental health, social well-being and learning for CHS students. She shared her belief that masks are harmful and offer “no benefits”. She would like the face covering policy to be rescinded.

Katie Sullivan, of the Chelmsford Federation of teachers spoke next. She asked that the School Committee in deciding about continuing the policy of mask wearing in school, consider that fact that many staff live with immunocompromised family at home. These teachers would want to be able to have their students wear masks in their classrooms. Those staff would appreciate the support of The Committee to protect these persons when deciding on the face coverings policy.

Melissa McDonald, of Six Colonial Terrace, who has four children in CPS and is a teacher at a neighboring district. Despite being vaccinated several of her family have had COVID19. She is concerned that continuing masking will harm the children. She is worried about the health and behavior issues of the students. She would like The Committee to move to remove the face covering policy.

The Chair stated that others have contacted The School Committee this week asking that the mask policy be rescinded.

## New Business

### 1. Review and Consideration of School Committee Policy EBCFA – Face Coverings

Dr. Hirsch provided slides and a verbal update as of today. Face coverings were approved on 8/18/2020. On February 9, 2022 Governor Baker and Commissioner Riley announced that the mandate would be lifted on 2/28/2022. She summarized the details of the Face Coverings policy, including information on exemptions and social distancing. She shared the vaccination rates for each school. Consultation has been ongoing with The Chelmsford Health Department, Massachusetts Department of Public Health and testing for COVID is being made available for all CPS students through “Pool Testing” and at-home rapid antigen testing. The positivity rate is declining. Vaccine clinics are still being held. The Chelmsford Health Department has recommended a delay in rescinding the mask mandate until **March 14, 2022**, due to the vacation week in February. Data proves there are positivity upticks in the virus after school breaks have taken place. The Massachusetts DPH advises masks still to be worn indoors for any who are elderly, have weakened immune systems or underlying medical conditions. **Unvaccinated individuals should continue to wear masks to prevent further spread of COVID 19.**

If the mask mandate were to be rescinded face coverings will **continue to be required** on school busses (per federal government mandate) and in health care offices in school. Continued monitoring will be shared with updates on the COVID 19 Dashboard. Information will be shared on availability of vaccine and booster clinics. The Committee may decide tonight to keep or rescind Policy EBCFA. They may amend the policy, or they may adopt the (MASC) Massachusetts Association of School Committees’ proposed policy which includes guidance from the CDC, DESE, and the Mass. Dept. of Public Health. Dr. Hirsch has included a slide with the details and also reviewed it during tonight’s meeting. To fully appreciate all of the information, you may view tonight’s meeting on Chelmsford Telemedia/ YouTube. Ms. Gump shared that the school nurses will continue to work with families who have particular needs in relation to COVID.

Ms. Santos asked if families will still be notified if a student in their child’s class tests positive. Ms. Gump stated that the notifications were ending with the exception of families with immunocompromised or health risk children. She expressed concerns that students may be “harassed” either for wearing or not wearing masks. Dr. Hirsch responded that the same discipline and consequences would apply as in other situations.

Ms. Newcomb shared that she has heard from many families both in support of retaining masks and those who want to policy to be rescinded. The Committee receives guidance from many sources including public health and DESE. She asked if the attorney for The Committee had recommended mandating testing, to which Dr. Hirsch replied he did not. Any testing can only be done on a voluntary basis.

Ms. Newcomb shared how stressful the mask issue has been. Decisions needing to be made during the pandemic “weigh heavily”. She feels there is no choice but to go ahead with the governor’s and DESE’s mandate for removing the mask requirement on February 28<sup>th</sup>. She would have preferred it not to happen so soon after school vacation. With masks being optional, she hopes we will continue to be cognizant of those around us who are fragile or immunocompromised. Masks should be available in the schools for all who want to wear them.

Mr. Doherty shared that lots of emails have been sent about the mask mandate and he has been impressed by the sincerity and compassion expressed. He thanks the people of Chelmsford for their thoughtful input. He expressed gratitude to school staff for all they have continued to do during the pandemic. He agrees with Ms. Newcomb on the mask issue.

Mr. Moses thanks Chelmsford residents for everyone being supportive instead of divisive. He also supports February 28<sup>th</sup> as the date for masks to become optional. He would have liked to have had a week or two after vacation as the effective date.

Ms. Santos shared how hard COVID has been on everyone. She feels compelled to lift the mandate to "mask optional". She expressed gratitude for the improvements made by the vaccines as well as improved school ventilation systems. Like others she would have preferred to keep the mask mandate for a week or two after vacation.

Mr. King thanks the people of Chelmsford for their understanding and for thanking The Committee for making the difficult decisions. As a science teacher he trusts the data and experts in the medical field. The vaccination rate is good and COVID numbers are declining. Making masks optional will allow people to make decisions for their children and these decisions will be supported by the schools. He is proud of all The District has done over the past two years to keep people healthy. He believes it is time to adopt the new policy which removes the requirement for masks in school.

Nurse Gump stressed that monitoring and close attention will be paid going forward. A supportive and inclusive environment will be maintained in the schools. People who are not vaccinated are strongly encouraged to wear a mask. Voluntary testing will continue as will vaccine and testing clinics.

**Mr. Moses motioned to adopt the updated MASC Policy for mask guidance EBCFA effective February 28, 2022. Mr. Doherty seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Motion carries 5-0.**

**Adjournment (6:54 p.m.)**

**Mr. Moses motioned to adjourn. Mr. Doherty seconded. Motion carries 5-0.**

*Respectfully submitted,  
Sharon Giglio, Recording Secretary*