

**INDIAN HILL EXEMPTED VILLAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
MINUTES
Special Meeting of August 16, 2021**

A special meeting of the Indian Hill Exempted Village School District was held on Monday, August 16 2021, at 8:30 a.m., in the Indian Hill High School Auditorium, 6865 Drake Road, Cincinnati, OH 45243 in accordance with notices sent to each member. Dr. Hooker, President, called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. and roll call showed the following members as present:

Mrs. Aichholz
Mrs. Singh

Dr. Hooker

Mrs. Lewis

Also present were Kirk Koennecke, Melissa Stewart, Mick Davis, Jim Nichols, Erica Leppert, Heather Higdon, Andy Cox, Eric Cimini, Nicole Isgrig, Katie Foster, Jeff Heinichen, Kris Flaska, Jerri Wentz, Jebb Lyons, John Zarbe, Melissa Chen, and others.

ADOPTION OF SPECIAL BUSINESS MEETING AGENDA (082126) – Mrs. Aichholz moved, seconded by Mrs. Singh, to adopt the agenda of the special business meeting of the Indian Hill Board of Education. All members present voted aye. Motion carried.

EXECUTIVE SESSION (082127) – Mrs. Lewis moved, seconded by Mrs. Singh, to move into Executive Session at 8:31 a.m. In accordance with O.R.C. 121.22(G) (3) - Conference with an attorney concerning disputes involving the public body that are the subject of pending or imminent court action; O.R.C. 121.22(G)(5) - Matters required to be kept confidential by federal law, rules, or state statutes

Roll call vote was as follows:

Mrs. Aichholz, aye
Mrs. Singh, aye

Dr. Hooker, aye

Mrs. Lewis, aye

Also present in Executive Session were Mr. Koennecke, Mr. Davis, Dr. Stewart, Mr. Nichols, Mrs. Leppert, and Bill Deters, District Counsel

Executive Session concluded at 9:03 a.m. and the Board reconvened its special meeting at 9:03 a.m. with all members present. Mrs. Johnston arrived at 10:44 a.m.

WORK SESSION

The Board of Education held a 2021-2022 School Re-Open Plan Dialogue which began with statements from the Board of Education members and was followed by a presentation by Superintendent Kirk Koennecke. The Board thanked Mr. Koennecke for his presentation and continued their 2021-2022 School Re-Open plan dialogue.

MOTION TO AMEND THE AGENDA (082128) – Mrs. Lewis moved, seconded by Mrs. Singh, to amend the agenda.

Roll call vote was as follows:

Mrs. Aichholz, aye
Mrs. Singh, aye

Dr. Hooker, aye

Mrs. Lewis, aye

MOTION TO APPROVE THE USE OF FACE COVERINGS THROUGH SEPTEMBER 14 (082129) – Mrs. Lewis moved, seconded by Mrs. Singh, to approve the policy for face mask coverings through September 14:

8450.01 - PROTECTIVE FACIAL COVERINGS DURING PANDEMIC/EPIDEMIC EVENTS

INDIAN HILL BOARD OF EDUCATION

USE OF FACE MASKS/COVERINGS

The Indian Hill Board of Education is committed to providing students, staff, and visitors with a safe and healthy environment.

In order to maintain a healthy environment, the Board will follow the mandates and requirements set forth by the federal government, Center for Disease Control, Ohio Governor, Ohio State Health Department, Hamilton County Health Department, Ohio Department of Education, and other entities (“Directing Entities”) as it relates to the protecting the health of students. If any of these Directing Entities or District Administration requires staff, students, and/or visitors to wear face coverings/masks that cover the mouth, nose, and chin while attending school, reporting to work at a school, or visiting a school, the District’s Administration will follow and enforce such directives.

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STAFF

As of July 2020, pursuant to *COVID-19 Health and Prevention Guidance for Ohio K-12 Schools* issued by the Ohio Department of Health and the Ohio Department of Education, all staff members must wear face coverings.

STUDENTS

All students K-12 will be required to wear face coverings/masks that cover the mouth, nose, and chin in the following areas:

- A. On school-provided transportation (including to and from school and school-related activities)
- B. All learning environments unless a teacher-directed face coverings/mask break is provided.

VISITORS

All visitors to campus must wear face coverings/masks that cover the mouth and nose.

FACE COVERINGS / MASKS

Face coverings/masks may include masks or face shields and should:

- A. Fully cover the mouth, nose, and chin;
- B. Fit snugly against the side of the nose, side of the face and covers the chin so there are no gaps;
- C. Not create difficulty breathing while worn; and
- D. Held secure through either a tie, elastic, etc. to prevent slipping.

Following legal consultation, the Superintendent may provide exceptions to this face coverings/mask policy with prior written approval.

Prior to an exception being made, District administration will discuss the request and other possible accommodations (ex. other options for face coverings, online learning, etc.). Such discussion shall follow District policies and procedures under Section 504 and the ADA.

Indian Hill School District is required to provide written justification to the local health officials upon request explaining why a staff member is not required to wear a facial covering/mask in the school.

Any school nurse or staff who care for individuals with COVID-19 symptoms must use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) in accordance with OSHA standards.

If face masks/coverings are required, and no exception has been applied, students and/or staff who violate this policy shall be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with the applicable Student Code of Conduct/Student Discipline Code, staff Code of Conduct, and in accordance with policies of the Board. If a student refuses to wear a mask, and no exception has been made, the student will be assigned to online learning in accordance with the Superintendent's authority to assign students contained in the Ohio Revised Code.

IH Board of Education Amendment to policy language adopted August 16, 2021:

- A. Masks are required inside all school buildings at all times for students, staff and visitors, until September 14.
 - 1. Masks can be removed for lunch in the cafeteria while students and staff are eating.
 - 2. Masks can be removed by students and/or staff in already approved school activities or events indoors related to the practice or competition times during performing arts and/or physical activities such as physical education, choir, gym, dance, and sporting contests.
 - 3. Visitors will be required to comply with the same masking requirements.
- B. Federal transportation Order through CDC requires masks for all passengers through Sept. 13.

Roll call vote was as follows:

Mrs. Aichholz, no
Mrs. Singh, aye

Dr. Hooker, aye

Mrs. Lewis, aye

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MOTION TO MODIFY AGENDA TO ALLOW FOR PUBLIC COMMENTARY (082130) – Mrs. Aichholz moved, seconded by Mrs. Singh, to modify the agenda to allow for public commentary.

Roll call vote was as follows:

Mrs. Aichholz, aye
Mrs. Singh, aye

Dr. Hooker, aye

Mrs. Lewis, aye

PUBLIC COMMENTARY –

Nicole Isgrig discussed the mask policy. Ms. Isgrig submitted the following for inclusion in the minutes as part of public commentary;

I'm going to begin with data directly sourced from the CDC: During this pandemic in the United States, as of August 11th, 2021, 52,672 children under the age of 18 have died, of all causes. Of those 52,672

deaths, 354 died, involving COVID, almost all with comorbidities. Fewer kids died of COVID-19 than heart disease, cancer, suicide, homicide, and birth defects, which killed hundreds of times more.

Why are we masking kids? They don't easily spread to adults; they are not effective vectors, and they are very resistant to COVID. In the last FOUR decades there are zero randomized control trials concluding that masks stop the spread of viral Upper Respiratory Infections. ZERO! Any data that proves any of this wrong, PLEASE provide it.

The flu poses a far greater pediatric threat than Covid. In the 2018-2019 season alone, almost 1,000 pediatric flu deaths were recorded. To be clear a typical flu season runs October thru May. Based on these numbers, alone, we should be masking every flu season. How ridiculous is that?!

A May 2020 meta-study on pandemic influenza published by the **US CDC** found that face masks had no effect, neither as personal protective equipment nor as a source control. (Source)

An article in the **New England Journal of Medicine** from May 2020 came to the conclusion that face masks offer little to no protection in everyday life. (Source)

A 2015 study in the British Medical Journal **BMJ Open** found that cloth masks were penetrated by 97% of particles and may increase infection risk by retaining moisture or repeated use.

The **WHO** admitted to the BBC that its June 2020 mask policy update was due not to new evidence but "political lobbying": "We had been told by various sources WHO committee reviewing the evidence had not backed masks but they

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wrapped and supervised forever does not help them become confident and capable adults. Isn't that our goal as parents; to raise quality and fully competent, critical thinking adults. I kindly ask the board to truly hear us and allow us, as parents, to choose what we think is best for our children.

recommended them due to political lobbying. This point was put to WHO who did not deny." (D. Cohen, BBC Medical Correspondent).

Dr. Hooker, you stated on August 10th that cases were up 400% in the last month. My question is, 400% of what? These percentages are the easiest scare mongering tactic, taken directly from mainstream media's playbook.

This brings me to the Infection Fatality Ratio vs the Case Fatality Ratio and whether most know the difference. Spend your time researching that in regard to Covid 19 and the flu instead of looking at the death numbers supplied 24/7 by the media.

If more people devoted their time to researching the data that is so easy to find versus putting their blind faith into the mainstream narrative, myself and other parents wouldn't have to be speaking to school boards. Just because the media reports it doesn't mean it's true but sadly so many believe it, like it's the gospel.

Dr. Lucy McBride is a practicing internist in Washington, D.C. She says quote,

"Fragmentary data and muddled messaging from the CDC and elsewhere have stoked the public's collective fear-especially among parents. The Delta surge has also created new opportunities for grifters, anti-vaccine propagandists, and others to spread misinformation that preys on parental anxiety."

Not all fear is irrational, we need it to survive. However, being constantly wired and dialed into our fears is unhealthy for us and our children. Dr.McBride also states, "Fixating on a single threat to our children's health can keep us from recognizing their broad human needs." Every day we face risks for our children. Every time my 16 year old drives her car I worry, but that doesn't stop me from allowing her the freedom and independence she deserves and needs to grow.

We as parents, truly deserve the CHOICE to do what we think is BEST for our children. In order to be good parents, we must check our own anxieties and biases. That holds true for this school board, as well. I'm truly astonished that we are expected to accept the ruling of a school board to tell us what is best for our children. WE DESERVE THE CHOICE! Keeping them bubble wrapped and supervised forever does not help them become confident and capable adults. Isn't that our goal as parents; to raise quality and fully competent, critical thinking adults. I kindly ask the board to truly hear us and allow us, as parents, to choose what we think is best for our children.

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Katie Foster discussed the mask policy. Ms. Foster submitted the following for inclusion in the minutes as part of public commentary;

*Dr. Daniel Wood
Prof. of Neurology
UC*

To the Indian Hill School Board,

Thank you for the opportunity provided today to air thoughts on the recent decision by the board regarding mask mandates. I am a Professor of Neurology and Vice Chair at the Department of Neurology at the University of Cincinnati with a rising 11th and 8th grader attending school, cross country, marching band, latin club, powwow and choir. My primary concern was echoed by one of the speakers last week, which is the long-term effects of COVID among survivors. A recent JAMA Neurology paper <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33666649/> found that 20% of over 1600 pediatric COVID patients suffered from neurologic symptoms including stroke, guillain barre and multisystem inflammatory syndrome. The long-term effects on our pediatric population won't be known for decades but autopsy studies of severe covid infection demonstrate a 70% rate of blood-brain-barrier leakage among the most severely affected. This leakage is the key patho-physio-logic event in many forms of progressive cognitive impairment. In developing children, it is difficult to overstate the importance of this well-established scientific and medical fact regarding COVID infection.

As stated tonight, it may be true that bodies of politicians (some of who may be doctors but most aren't) have not mandated masks in many school districts. But physician-led bodies of experts including the CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend masking during the current delta variant crisis that has seen skyrocketing rates of COVID infection in every state. I wouldn't ask a surgeon to do my taxes or for legal advice and we shouldn't take medical advice from non-medical professionals.

It is para-dox-ical to me that with a less contagious and less severe COVID last year, we had an appropriate and measured stay at home, versus in school with mask and appropriately guided levers to turn off and on different mandates. Yet with a more contagious variant, with greater evidence that vaccinated may be asymptomatic carriers and without the ability to achieve herd immunity within the state of Ohio which still is under 50% fully vaccinated, that we are seeking to end the sensible and measured restrictions when things are bad and lifting them when things get better policy. The rates quoted tonight are evidence of the success of such measures with very few children dying across the state of Ohio. One doesn't get rid of the parachute halfway down because it's working.

Much damage was done to the cause of civility by the laughter at the suffering of a mother whose family has seen first-hand, the long-term effects of COVID. There was absolutely no laughter or snide bickering when the mask-choice side gave their heartfelt side. Please do not view that small contingent of vocal parents last week as reflecting the mood of the thousands of parents throughout this community. Nor should such duty to responsibility be subject to the mood and if I heard correctly, threats of the mob.

People used to argue that they had the right to drink and drive. They have the right to drink in the privacy of their own home but others have the right not to be endangered by their behavior on a public road. People used to argue that they had the right to smoke wherever they wanted. They have the right to smoke in their own home as much as they want to but others in enclosed public spaces have the right not to be exposed to danger from their smoke. Here to, people have the right not to vaccinate or wear masks and to decide for their children. No one is taking that away from them and if anything, every accommodation is being made for them. But in public spaces and schools, others have the right not to be exposed to the dangers of those behaviors. At least during this current spike, nearly as bad as the worst of the pandemic last year, we should be temporarily cautious and let events and science dictate how we raise these restrictions. Hopefully soon.

My kids are vaccinated as are my wife and I. I do believe that if we can bear through these difficult times, that they will end quicker. But if we delay and delay the correct measures, these difficult times will linger for years and years.

I thank you for taking the time to read my thoughts and for your thoughtful and responsible service to our community and especially, our children. I

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had no idea how hard your jobs were until last week! My due respect to all of the members in these difficult times.

It must seem very easy and convenient to find reports on the internet that supports our own point of view. I could easily cite scientifically rigorous peer-reviewed articles that support both masking as well as not masking. Which only leads me to conclude that both sides could be right, particularly as vaccinations and new variants arise with different levels of effectiveness for which older data may not apply. The jury is still out, we don't know for sure and can only make the best decision we can with the information at hand. However, the current established thought among physician experts, however flawed it may be, from the CDC, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society, is that during this latest spike from the delta variant, the very high potential of vaccinated asymptomatic cases leading to greater propensity for spread, each of these bodies of experts in the field support mandatory and universal school masking. Perhaps new information will come along that those bodies of experts will change that opinion and if our current spike dissipates with more vaccinations leaving the virus no where to spread to, this temporary mandate can be lifted. I sincerely hope so. We are all colored by our first-hand experiences. From the front lines, there is a whole world of suffering from the death of a loved one, brain damage, amputations, lifelong dialysis and chronic pulmonary, neurologic and behavioral consequences that biases mine. At the same time, I sincerely believe in the wider discomforts of masking which those not on the front-lines must surely suffer from which must also be occurring. So how do we decide?

There isn't a right or wrong answer, there isn't one side winning. I wish it were. There's only doing the best that we can with the information we have and hoping for the best. Let's try not to lose our community spirit or divide ourselves in that process. I pray for us to set an example for our kids of how we came together as a community in an imperfect situation to do the best that we can with the information we have. Respecting all sides and viewpoints, even if we can't make everyone happy.

Go braves and God Bless!

Daniel Woo, MD, MS

Professor of Neurology

Vice-Chair of Clinical Research

Department of Neurology and Rehabilitation Medicine

University of Cincinnati College of Medicine

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Dear Members of the Board and Superintendent,

I wrote to each of you last week explaining our family's situation with our son Jonah. He's a 6 year old boy with severe tracheobronchomalacia that will be entering kindergarten this August. We are concerned to hear there is a possibility for a vote to reverse the universal masking policy in the district and ask you to please keep this policy in place for the good of all unvaccinated children in the district.

In your consideration of keeping the policy in place I ask you to consider a few variables. First, there is no denying the rising number of Covid-19 cases across the country and right here in Cincinnati. For the first time Pediatric PICU's are filling up and that won't change without more mandates in place country wide. There are also almost 2000 children hospitalized with COVID-19 across the country right now. That's more than 300 from this time last week. Secondly, what safety measures are in place to mitigate exposure within our district's schools? We were made aware that other than air filters, no mitigation strategies are currently in place at the primary school. If masking is not enforced we will have to pull our child. This decision is per the recommendations of his pulmonologist, ENT, Immunologist and pediatrician at Cincinnati Children's. We're not basing this decision on what we feel are unfair policies, but on actual guidance from our son's medical team. How would forcing a medically complex child out of school be equitable, inclusive or even remotely modeling the basic principle on the walls of the primary school to "protect others?" If we are concerned about the mental health of kids we need ALL of them to be in-person, not just the students of the loudest parents that refuse to follow simple and effective safety guidelines set forth by numerous medical associations in this country. Public schools have a duty and responsibility to all students, particularly those that fall under a 504 or IEP to take reasonable measures to ensure their safety while at school. Air filters alone are not a reasonable measure to protect anyone's safety during a global pandemic. Without masks the vulnerable will be left to isolate at home once again and rolling quarantines will isolate other children at home. If we're truly concerned about mental health than why is it only with the mental health of able

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bodies students? Children with chronic health conditions and their families struggle with unimaginable battles everyday in regards to mental health. Our son suffers from severe PTSD from past medical trauma and anxiety. Why does his mental health not matter and how could anyone think it is acceptable to tell children to stay home or find a new school? Families simply trying to protect their children should not be forced out of school and that is what will happen with a mask optional mandate. Our family isn't one that can suddenly afford to switch to a private school or up and move to another district again. Let's also remember that the district is required to offer an education to children like my son, and with no BVA this year administrators and teachers will be scrambling at the last minute to find teachers and create a curriculum for students opting out of in-person learning. Let's please not add anymore stress to the teachers and staff. With a mask optional policy at school who will enforce OUR decision for our son to be masked at school? Will the teachers really be asked to keep track of which child should be wearing a mask on top of their other many tasks? We are also kidding ourselves if we think peer pressure and bullying won't happen to children that are masked among their unmasked peers. Have you seen the video of the Franklin County TN school board meeting? How about the mental health of students battling the fear of retribution from their peers as well as concerns for their own health. Instead of arguing about the emotional impact of masks on students let's work together to find ways to mitigate these problems. Our district has an abundance of talented student entrepreneurs. Let's help cultivate those students passions by letting them come up with solutions for these problems that also fall in line with the overwhelming majority of accredited health professionals and health organizations in this country. We should be harnessing our efforts to encourage students to use their big brains to sew and sell masks with clear plastic over the mouth so they can see each other smile while in school. Our PTO and schools should be working with parents to help create safe pods for students that feel like outsiders or alone this upcoming year. There is hope and there is an end to all this, but it can only happen if we all agree to work together to help ALL our children thrive.

Thank you, Katie and Kevin Foster

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/children-hospitalized-with-covid-19-us-hits-record-number-2021-08-14/>

These numbers have doubled since I sent the link last week:

<https://www.tn.gov/health/cedep/ncov/data/hospitalization-data/current-covid-hospitalizations.html>

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Jerri Wentz discussed the mask policy. Ms. Wentz submitted the following for inclusion in the minutes as part of public commentary;

Face masks

Good morning. My name is Jerri Wentz. I have lived in the Indian Hill school district for 24 years and I have 3 children. My youngest is a senior this year.

As I was preparing for today I was thinking of all the things I want to say... please don't ruin my son's senior year, I am legitimately scared for the mental health of all Indian Hill students, why do some people proposing masks only wear them when they are trying to create fear, why are they twisting the data to make things sound worse than it is, why is the school board micro-managing their superintendent, why don't they listen to their teachers who are the heartbeat of the schools, what the heck happened to "my body, my choice" and while I'm thinking about it, since when do I need

someone else's permission to parent my kids.

All of these thoughts were immediately followed by a visual of the school board President raising his voice and talking down to more than half of the auditorium. An audience of his neighbors and peers, some of whom voted him into office. At that point I better understood why the Rangers were called to the last meeting and realized that this would lead us nowhere.

So, back to the beginning...how can we come together as a community? How do we find middle ground? Mask, No-mask. It seems to me that the compromise between mask and no-mask is mask optional. Hmm, it seems the teachers and Kirk were on to something here! What do they know that we all have forgotten? They are probably thinking about what good citizens our children are. The example that

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comes to mind was when I remembered the class of 2016 voting Abby Fovel (a girl with Downs Syndrome) as their Prom Queen. It made Abby feel like the rock star that she is and our kids redefined the word “special” that night. So here’s my final thought... instead of enforcing a policy that has zero data to support it what if we trusted each other, our kids, our teachers and our superintendent? I think of “optional” as meaning “room to breathe” and not be scolding children for wanting to take a breath. Thank you.

Melissa Chen discussed the mask policy. Ms. Chen submitted the following for inclusion in the minutes as part of public commentary;

August 15, 2021

Dear Members of the School Board,

Andrea Binder-necked

Thank you for your service to our schools, our community, and our children. It cannot be easy to be asked to make decisions that affect so many people, especially when the decisions hinge on information that might not be in your area of expertise, and when the constituents you serve have such polar opposite opinions and strong emotions to go along with them.

We ALL want this pandemic to be over. Nobody WANTS to wear a mask if it is not necessary. But this pandemic is not yet over and we ALL must work TOGETHER to keep each other safe until it is. That means doing things that are inconvenient and uncomfortable, for the safety not just of ourselves, but of ALL our children and of EACH OTHER.

My plea is to take the emotion and politics out of the decisions about school-based pandemic safety protocols, and to **listen to the professionals** who have spent their lives learning about science, practicing medicine and how to evaluate sources and interpret data streams for accuracy and bias, and who for their whole adult lives, and especially during this pandemic, have given of themselves and put their own lives and families at risk to care for their patients – our children, our friends, our communities.

I am writing to you as the parent of two Indian Hill students (one who is immunized against COVID, and one who is not yet eligible by age), but more importantly, as a **Pediatrician**. My area of expertise, having practiced over the course of almost 20 years - in Emergency Medicine at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center as well as more recently in the community as part of a TriHealth Pediatrics practice – is the **health and safety of children**. The following information is based on scientific data, consensus in the medical community, and my personal experience caring for pediatric patients (including from the Indian Hill community) throughout the pandemic.

I know you must have an overwhelming number of letters to read, so I will try to keep this as short as possible. I would be happy to provide any references should you be interested in supporting sources.

I (and the overwhelming majority of physicians in our community) support universal masking of ALL students and staff indoors at all levels, but particularly for the preschool, elementary, and middle schools which contain the most at-risk students who are not yet eligible for COVID vaccination. This recommendation is strongly backed by science, including updated guidelines from the **CDC, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and Hamilton County Public Health**.

Masks work to prevent transmission of COVID-19

- Masks are an important, scientifically proven mitigation strategy
- Masks may not be perfect, but a **well-fitting appropriate mask is without doubt better than no mask for preventing transmission** of virus.

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- Optional masking is not sufficient, as masks are most effective when all parties are wearing them.
- **If masks are not worn by every student (and teacher), CDC/HCPH quarantine guidelines will force large numbers of students (as well as teachers) to quarantine at home** – and we all know after last year how different in-person education is compared to self-guided work at home. We all share in the goal of keeping students in school; masks will undoubtedly help achieve this goal.
- Without a virtual learning option this coming year, more students will be in each classroom, which means less ability to maintain physical distance, increasing the importance of masking.
- Masks also had the added benefit last year of keeping other viral respiratory illnesses at exceptionally low levels. This too kept more kids in school, decreased COVID testing burden, and lessened the stress on families of having to determine if an illness was COVID or not.

The COVID-19 Delta variant (now the predominant strain in the US) is more than 2x as contagious as previous variants

- With the Delta variant currently causing surges in cases, healthcare shortages, and renewed healthcare provider burnout across the country, our local COVID numbers continue to worsen, driven by a pandemic within the unvaccinated.
- **Children and even vaccinated individuals can easily transmit the Delta variant (which is why even asymptomatic vaccinated individuals should AGAIN wear masks in public indoor places)**
- The most recent data for our region shows increasing transmission (as measured by R values), increasing incidence, increasing hospitalizations, and increasing test positivity rates (with the 5-17 year old age group among the highest positivity rates).
- A positive COVID diagnosis in a child not wearing a mask in class, especially given the transmissibility of the current variant, would have repercussions for many students and teachers, putting in jeopardy everyone's ability to learn, but also gravely endangering especially those with visible (and invisible) medical fragility.
- Data is still emerging (published data in order to be verified and peer reviewed for accuracy often lags behind real-time trends) but suggest the **Delta variant may cause more severe illness than previous strains** in unvaccinated individuals (including in our kids!)

The COVID-19 vaccines work, but not enough of our population is vaccinated – we still need masks

- The COVID-19 vaccines authorized in the US are highly effective at preventing severe disease and death, including against the Delta Variant. Vaccination is a key factor preventing spread
- **Not enough Americans or teens have been vaccinated and it is not yet an option for many of our younger students – we are nowhere near the levels of vaccination needed to reach “herd immunity”**
- Unfortunately, hopes for vaccination in age groups 5-11 sometime this fall were recently diminished by the FDA's announcement last week requiring additional enrollees in Pfizer's vaccine trials (the most promising vaccine for the younger school-age group). Potential vaccine approval is likely several months in the future (potentially January).
- Parents have no guarantee that their child's teacher will be vaccinated.
- In the absence of universal vaccination, masking is the next best protective measure

The mental health effects of missing school far outweigh any purported effects of wearing a mask

- The incredible surge of mental health difficulties pediatricians (!) have been seeing during the pandemic across all age spectrums is real and concerning
- **The vast majority of these have to do with the disruption of routine (missing school, sports, activities), being separated from friends and family, isolation, fear of infection and illness, loss of loved ones to COVID, and uncertainty about the future. Not about wearing masks.**
- Children have been incredibly resilient and have taken to wearing masks capably across the entire school-age spectrum (much better than adults have)
- Quarantine requirements lead to stressful home situations (especially for working parents) which clearly impacts the mental health of children negatively
- Optional masking is likely to create uncomfortable situations between students who do or do not wear masks, with opportunities for peer pressure and polarization within student groups which will be more harmful for emotional health than universal masking would be.

Our priority HAS to be maximizing the chance of success of SAFE in-person school during a particularly dangerous time of the pandemic, when a more virulent highly transmissible strain is predominant, and during a time where families are fatigued and have recently been lulled into a sense of security, which, with the rise of the Delta variant, is no longer applicable. It is harder to go backwards to increasing restriction after having tasted the freedom and security that higher rates of vaccinations and declining caseloads brought us temporarily.

If nothing else, this virus has taught us humility. At every turn, and as cases surge and more data become available, what we know evolves. **Science is about constantly learning. When data changes, we have to adapt to that change. That time is now.**

The Indian Hill school district successfully navigated in person school last year thanks to the mitigation strategies in place, including mandatory masking. There is no reason to change this track record now.

Universal masking is a SMALL price to pay for our children to be able to safely go to and stay in school until they are able to be vaccinated, and until this virus and its variants are no longer filling our hospitals and intensive care units with loved ones, including our children. In this case, public health and the safety of everyone in the classroom MUST trump personal choice.

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I empathize with and share the desire to return to “normalcy”. I am hopeful that by the end of this calendar year, all school-aged children will have the ability to be fully vaccinated. Until that time, I unequivocally recommend that the Indian Hill School District continues to listen to scientific advice from the CDC, AAP, and local physicians, and mandate universal masking by all students and staff indoors. I also recommend actively re-evaluating the data periodically to adjust policies to current epidemiology and vaccination trends with the help of healthcare professionals and experienced public health organizations.

Thank you for all of your incredibly hard work, and for helping keep our students, staff, families, and community safe.

Sincerely,

Andrea Rinderknecht MD FAAP

Jeffrey Heinichen discussed the mask policy. Mr. Heinichen submitted the following for inclusion in the minutes as part of public commentary;

My name is Jeff Heinichen, and I am a parent of children in the Indian Hill School District.

I live in a country where I can stand in front of my school board and state my opinion. You may not listen to me and that’s your choice but as long as I’m respectful and follow the law I have no fear of what I say.

John Kennedy once said “Let us not be blind to our differences, but let us also direct attention to our common interests and the means by which those differences can be resolved. And if we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity. For in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children’s future. And we are all mortal.”

I firmly believe that Ohio Revised Code Title 33 does not give this school board the authority to make health mandates and therefore the vote on August 3 and August 10, is without authority and unenforceable. I am surprised that a certain Board Member who is an attorney and has been recognized in Ohio Super Lawyers and Best Lawyers in America has not counseled her colleagues to that effect.

I have been asked what can we do if the vote, which I claim is without authority and unenforceable, stays in place when school starts. My response is, make your own choice for your children. You can chose to have your child come to school without a mask. There is no mechanism in the School Board’s Policy or the School District’s rules to punish anyone for “violation” of an illegal or unenforceable order. I do not believe they can or will do anything. I do not believe it is within the power or training of the Teachers to enforce improper and illegal actions. Should your child be punished you will have a prima facie case for damages. The School Board’s qualified immunity will not protect them from illegal acts. It is your choice.

So, why am I here? Remember my Kennedy quote. “let us not be blind to our differences, but let us also direct attention to our common interests”? I’m here to offer a compromise, which is to have the School Board amend its order to provide a one week period of “strongly requesting” all Students wear masks and at the end of that week, if the average number of new cases per day as reported by Hamilton County Health Board does not increase by 20%, parents and students be permitted to make the choice to wear masks or not. A proposed Board Amendment is attached.



**INDIAN HILL EXEMPTED VILLAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
MINUTES – August 16, 2021**

Suggested Indian Hill School Board Motion

I hereby move the Indian Hill School District Board of Education amend the Mask Mandate orders of August 3, 2021 and August 10, 2021, to remove the Mandate to Wear masks and replace the it with a “Strongly recommend, in the interest of attempting to effect the spread of Covid-19” that all Indian Hill District School students wear face coverings while indoors at the Indian Hill Schools, for the period of August 19, 2021 to August 27, 2021, at which time, a review of the average number of new cases per day, will be made, and if that daily average is less than a 20 % increase over the daily average as of August 19, 2021, the recommendation of the School Board be stated as Mask Optional.

Kris Flaska discussed the mask policy.

Jebb Lyons discussed the mask policy.

John Zerbe discussed the mask policy. Mr. Zerbe submitted the following for inclusion in the minutes as part of public commentary;

John J. Zerbe / Public Commentary / August 16, 2021

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to be here today. My name is John Zerbe. My wife, Amanda, and I are raising four young boys here in Indian Hill. My son Jack is six years old and a rising 1st grader in the Primary school.

I am here as an advocate for a “mask optional” school year. What is best for one child and what is best for another child does not have to be mutually exclusive. This does not have to be a zero-sum game. We should all have the opportunity to do what’s best for our children.

The past 18 months have been tough for everyone. Confusion. Anxiety. Lockdowns. Quarantines, etc. All of us in this room have suffered to some degree. There has been physical suffering and there has been mental & emotional suffering.

I’d like to spend a moment talking about the quantitative vs the qualitative parts of our lives. Quantitative topics are obviously more easily measured. What can be measured can more easily be understood. We come across quantitative metrics all the time. Weather. Stock prices. Sports scores. COVID-19 has been no different. Since March of 2020, we have had a nonstop feed of COVID data: positive cases, hospitalizations, hot spots.

We are flooded with this data. We can chart it, trend it, and we can even assign color codes to compare ourselves to other parts of the country or the world. This data is everywhere.

While quantitative metrics are more of a science, the qualitative side of our lives is not as easily measured. Some examples:

“At what moment did you fall in love with your husband or wife?”

“How much do you love your children?”

“How was your day?”

“How happy are you?”

“How sad are you?”

These questions are more difficult to answer with data. They are not as easily defined. But just because we cannot quantify the answers to these questions, it does not mean that the answers are not important.

What we’re not talking about is the **qualitative** side of COVID-19. What about the people who are not accounted for in a metric? What about how our children are feeling? Has anyone bothered to ask the kids how they’re doing?

**INDIAN HILL EXEMPTED VILLAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
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Most of us in this auditorium are adults. We are better equipped than our children to deal with difficult situations. How do we quantify the emotional and mental suffering our children are experiencing? I don't know how to quantify it, but I know it's there in my son, Jack. He is not doing as well as he should be doing.

The mask acts as a muzzle on him. He told us this every day during the school year. Just last week, when driving past the Primary school, he said he missed his school, but he said to my wife "please don't make me wear a mask." While a certain Board member might categorize this as "garbage", we know it's not.

This emotional and mental suffering is real. It can't be measured in a CDC chart, but it's real. You should not be mandating masks. This needs to be a choice. We cannot and should not value one child's suffering over another one's.

This is wrong. We are lucky enough to live in the best school district in Ohio. This Board was elected to maintain and build upon that prestige for the benefit of the next generation. You need to do better. We need more balance.

A secret, emergency meeting on August 3rd with a moment's notice to quickly vote for a mask mandate? That was the easy way out. You need to have the courage to put in real work and come up with a creative solution that allows all children to thrive and grow.

The rushed decision to mandate masks sets us all up for failure. There is no finish line. Whether you want to admit it or not, the risk to our children dying of COVID19 is so incredibly low. They have a 99.9944% chance of surviving COVID. That is based on publicly-available, reliable information that I shared with each of you in an email on August 5th.

We need to stop with cherry-picked data points and propaganda. Stop reciting incomplete and misleading information, such as Cincinnati Children's COVID cases ~~rose~~^{fell} 400% last month. Compared to the prior month? Compared to the prior year? Are we talking about an increase from 1 case to 5? 1,000 to 5,000? The risk of a child dying from this disease is so incredibly low, and no different from risks that we all accept daily. You know that. But for some strange reason, you are choosing to not admit it.

Listen to all your constituents. Please swallow your pride, set aside your emotions, and vote for a mask optional school year. Thank you.

ADJOURNMENT (082131) – Mrs. Aichholz moved, seconded by Mrs. Singh, to adjourn the Special Meeting of the Indian Hill Board of Education at 11:12 a.m. Roll call vote was as follows:

Mrs. Aichholz, aye
Mrs. Lewis, aye

Dr. Hooker, aye
Mrs. Singh, aye

Mrs. Johnston, aye



Board President



Treasurer