

Franklin School Committee
February 16, 2022
Municipal Building – Council Chambers
5:00 P.M.

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Vision Statement

The Franklin Public Schools will foster within its students the knowledge and skills to find and achieve satisfaction in life as productive global citizens.

Members of the public are now welcome to attend committee meetings in person. Additionally, in an effort to ensure citizen engagement, citizens will be able to continue to view the public meeting using Zoom. We will use the Zoom Webinar feature. You may view the meeting with the link or phone numbers below. Participants wishing to speak during the Citizen's Comments portion of the agenda will be able to raise their hand to be recognized by the Chair. The webinar host will invite the attendee to unmute for comment.

Zoom Info:

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SPECIAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES

“The listing of matters are those reasonably anticipated by the Chair which may be discussed at the meeting. Not all items listed may in fact be discussed and other items not listed may also be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by law.”

Ms. Spencer called the meeting to order at 5:26pm.

Roll Call Attendance were: Ms. Camille Bernstein-Yes; Mr. David Callaghan-Yes; Mr. Al Charles-Yes; Mr. David McNeill; Ms. Denise Spencer-Yes; Ms. Elise Stokes-Yes; Ms. Meghan Whitmore-Yes

Also in attendance were: Dr. Sara Ahern and Mrs. Paula Marano

Ms. Spencer read an expectation of conduct when in the council chambers statement.

I. Discussion Only

February 16, 2022 Special School Committee Meeting - FINAL

- A. Response to Open Meeting Law complaint against public officers, namely the members of the School Committee, filed with the Committee by Kyle Thompson and dated February 3, 2022.

Ms. Spencer read an open letter to Mr. Thompson regarding the findings from his complaint. She said the finding was that there was no Open Meeting Law violation. She noted no further action will take place regarding the complaint. She noted that in addition to working with the district's attorney, they worked with the Massachusetts State Ethics Commission and the MASC on this complaint.

II. Discussion/Action/Possible Vote

- A. Policy EBCFA – Face Coverings

**See presentation slides for detailed information*

Dr. Ahern said that DESE will not extend the mask mandate beyond 2/28/22.

She added that with a mandate no longer in place, it falls to each district's local policy. Dr. Ahern recapped when the policy became in effect and when any amendments were made, noting the change this past December, 2021 at FHS with the mask option and 4% threshold. She noted the Omicron variant and masks back in place at the high school since Franklin hit 4%.

Dr. Ahern cited a Washington Post opinion article where Dr. Joseph Allen cited decision makers for masks to be: wastewater, healthcare capacity, hospitalizations due to COVID, and risk level.

Dr. Ahern shared a graph of wastewater data and where the spike occurred and is now falling.

Dr. Ahern shared her recommendation to the school committee. She said she is recommending that Franklin go mask optional as of February 28, 2022. She noted that FHS could have a consideration for 2/17 or 2/18 based on the DESE waiver. She also noted that:

- It is recommended that immunocompromised and unvaccinated individuals continue to mask.
- Vaccinated individuals can continue to wear a mask if they choose to do so.
- Individuals should be treated respectfully if they choose to wear a mask or not choose to wear one.

Dr. Ahern noted that masks would not optional in the following areas:

- Masking on buses and health offices will still be in effect as they are governed by other rules and do not pertain to DESE.
- Masks will still be required for those who test positive and return to school on day 6 or later through day 10.
- Even with MIAA dropping their mask requirement, it will be up to each venue or host school.

Dr. Ahern gave a summary of the different layers of mitigation available for the students

like vaccines and home testing and those available in the schools like UVGI and HEPA units. She noted personal practices like good hand hygiene and self monitoring for symptoms.

Dr. Ahern shared vaccine information by school with Franklin's overall vaccination rate as of 2/10/22 is at 75%. She said staff vaccine data is still being collected. She added that ECDC data is not captured here as the children are too young to be vaccinated and would only capture staff data. She said if there is enough interest they can host another mobile vaccine clinic. There is a vaccine clinic scheduled for 2/23/22 at the Franklin Senior Center.

Dr. Ahern shared the % of students COVID positive by level in the last 90 days. She said this is for both vaccinated and unvaccinated. She added there are those who are worried about optional masks at ECDC but pointed out that ECDC has the lowest % of COVID positive students and given the children's ages, are the least mask compliant.

Dr. Ahern shared some data on the rapid antigen tests that are distributed at the schools. Right now, 37% of students have opted in and 71% of staff have opted in. Sign-up for this program is ongoing and right now is running until April.

Dr. Ahern also shared some data on symptomatic testing. Right now, 57% of staff have opted in and 71% students have opted in. Sign-up for this program is ongoing.

Dr. Ahern spoke about "One way masking" and N95 masks. She said that there are 24,000 KN95/N95 masks in storage and additional masks at the schools. She added there had been a concern of the KN95 that were distributed to the staff by the Dept. of Education. At the time, the masks Franklin got had not been tested but they have since been tested and have a filtration rating of 98%.

Dr. Ahern also shared a graph of COVID cases in the FPS as of 2/10/22, noting the recent spike. She said COVID numbers decrease on a daily basis in Franklin. She also shared some COVID case trends in Franklin and cases by age group. She noted that she is aware of the concern of timing and being right after February break. She shared a graph of COVID cases in FPS 2020/2021 and noted there was not the same level of peak after February/April break in 2021 as there was after Thanksgiving and New Years that year.

Dr. Ahern shared some other considerations such as daily summaries changing over to weekly summaries, attendance would be monitored especially after vacation weeks, communication with the nurses on absences, local districts have voted to make masks optional with different start times in place, opt in for test kits still happening, and those who are immunocompromised should continue to mask and can have conversations about different accommodations.

Ms. Spencer asked for a motion and a second to adopt the Policy EBCFA – Face Coverings as presented by Dr. Ahern.

Motion: Ms. Stokes; Second: Mr. McNeill

Ms. Spencer asked for any questions or comments from the committee?

Ms. Bernstein and Ms. Stokes noted the audience side discussions were very distracting in which Ms. Spencer asked the audience to try and abstain from side discussions. Ms. Bernstein says she appreciates all the data and all traveling after vacation weeks is a concern and a possible spike happening.

Mr. Callaghan said no matter the vote, COVID is far from over but noted all the progress from March of 2020. He said so much has been learned and there are now vaccinations. He said work still needs to be done by the committee after the fact to properly identify a variant and steps to take. He said he is glad to see a vaccine clinic coming to the senior center and happy to see a possible mobile clinic. He encouraged people to talk to their doctor or pediatrician about getting the vaccine if they haven't done so yet. He said moving forward, there are other issues the community and school committee will tackle such as budget issues, teacher shortages, and lower student population growth. He said in order to move forward, the community needs to work together.

Mr. Charles asked what the process is if a student tests positive?

Dr. Ahern said the protocols do not change from where they are now, a student will isolate for 5 days and return on day 6 if not symptomatic.

Mrs. Marano added that masks are required until day 10.

Dr. Ahern added this pertains to a symptomatic or asymptomatic case.

Mr. Charles asked about close contacts to the positive student.

Dr. Ahern said they have stopped contact tracing and do symptomatic testing only. The Wednesday suggestion for the antigen tests are in hope of capturing the weekend exposures.

Mr. Charles asked about communication for upcoming vaccine clinics?

Dr. Ahern said they will be surveying families to see if there is interest in a mobile vaccine clinic. She said a threshold of interest needs to be met to have this set up.

Mr. Charles asked what happens if this policy is changed and based on absences if the school committee wants to revisit this, what is the process?

Dr. Ahern said the policy can be revisited by the school committee at any point. She added that the wastewater component is a leading indicator but more information would be needed on that. She noted that the DPH and DESE did not put out a component to the schools.

Mr. McNeill said thank you to Dr. Ahern for reiterating the ventilation in the schools. He said we can find comfort for high vaccination rate. He confirmed that if another variant were to be found, this policy can be revisited by the policy sub-committee?

Dr. Ahern said that the subcommittee or full committee can review policy regularly.

Mr. McNeill asked if there is any sense as to what in school transmission has been?

Dr. Ahern said that is difficult to pin down. She added there was no evidence last year and with contact tracing this year and last, the transmission seemed to be at home within families. She added that there were a couple of instances this year where there was some concern. They were in contact with the DPH Epidemiologist who offered some guidance to test the entire class/entire team.

Ms. Spencer asked the audience to silence their cell phones.

Ms. Stokes asked if there is any data to show that Franklin is at a higher risk than other communities?

Dr. Ahern replied that she has no indication of that.

Ms. Stokes about Dr. Ahern's thoughts on waiting a week or two after February break instead of February 28?

Dr. Ahern replied that the longer time between the decision and implementation, the less mask compliance will happen and harder it is to enforce.

Mrs. Marano added that they did not see a spike in cases after Columbus Day weekend or Martin Luther King weekend.

Dr. Ahern added Halloween as well.

Ms. Stokes confirmed they are not doing contact tracing anymore?

Mrs. Marano said they are not but they will be getting notified of any positive cases as well as close contacts at home. They will still be reporting to DESE on a weekly basis.

Ms. Whitmore said she is concerned about masks on and then masks off. She said she would be in support of waiting some additional time past February 28th.

Ms. Bernstein read a statement she wrote to parents and the community regarding the support the school committee has gotten and also the lack thereof from some in the community.

Ms. Spencer thanked all the citizens who emailed the committee over the past few days. She said she respects the parental involvement and that parents want what is best for their children. She said their decision is not being swayed by any threats that have been made to the committee.

Ms. Whitmore made a motion to amend Dr. Ahern's recommendation to March 14th, 2022.

Ms. Spencer asked for a second to amend Dr. Ahern's recommendation of February 28, 2022 to March 14th, 2022. There was no second.

Ms. Bernstein made a motion to amend Dr. Ahern's recommendation to March 7th, 2022.

Ms. Spencer asked for a second to amend Dr. Ahern's recommendation of February 28, 2022 to March 7th, 2022. Ms. Whitmore seconded the motion.

Motion: Ms. Bernstein; Second: Ms. Whitmore

Roll call vote: Ms. Bernstein-Yes; Mr. Callaghan-Yes; Mr. Charles-No; Mr. McNeill-No; Ms. Stokes-No; Ms. Whitmore-Yes; Ms. Spencer-No

Motion Does Not Pass 3-4

Ms. Spencer asks for a roll call vote on Dr. Ahern's original recommendation of February 28, 2022.

Motion: Ms. Stokes; Second: Mr. McNeill

Roll call vote: Ms. Bernstein-Yes; Mr. Callaghan-Yes; Mr. Charles-Yes; Mr. McNeill-Yes; Ms. Stokes-Yes; Ms. Whitmore-Yes; Ms. Spencer-Yes
Motion Carries 7-0

Ms. Spencer noted that masking is not the only issue facing the school committee and Franklin. They will be working on strategic plans for the schools, possible redistricting, budget season and having to replace Dr. Ahern. She asked the community to stay informed and stay tuned in.

III. Ms. Spencer asked for a motion to adjourn.

Motion: Ms. Stokes; Second: Mr. McNeill
Roll call vote: Ms. Bernstein-Yes; Mr. Callaghan-Yes; Mr. Charles-Yes; Mr. McNeill-Yes; Ms. Stokes-Yes; Ms. Whitmore-Yes; Ms. Spencer-Yes
Motion Carries 7-0

IV. Adjournment at 6:30pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Christina Tocci, Secretary

Mask Considerations.pdf