

River Grove Elementary
Board of Directors Special Meeting
Monday, August 30, 2021 - 7:00PM
MINUTES

1.0 Meeting called to order at 7:01pm.

1.1 Roll Call: Board members in attendance: Lisa Dochniak, Angie Hong, Marcy Ost, Jessica Hansen, Katie Bruns, Annie Beck, Katherine Hardie. Also in attendance: Drew Goodson.

2.0 Community Discussion

2.1 River Grove School Board Public Comments Policy - Ost reminded parents of the policy, which was read at the last meeting.

2.2 Community Comments

- Mitch Otterson spoke. A study published by the CDC in May 2021 came to the conclusion that masking teachers and improving ventilation were the most impactful mitigating factors for reducing student COVID rates. Requiring masks for students did not improve student COVID transmission rates. Filtering, diluting, and purifying air reduces transmission rates by half.
- **Anne Levers** spoke. Her children are enrolled in River Grove. She is a physician and urges the school to follow CDC and American Academy of Physicians recommendations to have all children and adults masked.
- Megan Lapos spoke. We should not take away a parent's choice and ability to protect their children. If other parents choose not to have their child wear a mask, it puts her child and other children at risk. It is best to be cautious until a vaccine is available for children ages 5-11.
- Stephanie Leonard spoke. They are a new family and her children are beginning 1st and 4th grade. They are very excited about the outdoor, environmental education setting. They are happy to see that Grove is taking a layered approach to mitigating COVID. She is concerned about allowing families to opt out of masking. Now that Minnesota is experiencing high transmission, she would like to see universal masking required until rates are lower. We are still learning about the impacts of the new Delta variant and it is best to be cautious.

3.0 COVID-19 Response and Masking Policy Update

- Drew Goodson provided context as to the reason for tonight's meeting. Looking at current transmission rates for Washington County and the Stillwater School District, COVID rates have more than doubled in two weeks and we are now in a state of high COVID transmission.
- Goodson reviewed updated COVID statistics, policies at local school districts, and new guidance from the MN Department of Health.
 - MDH quarantine procedures: If all students are wearing well-fitting masks and other prevention strategies are in place, the class is not required to quarantine when there is a positive COVID case (child only). Quarantine is still required if there is a positive case for an adult in the room.
 - The current levels of COVID transmission are about the same as they were last fall when we began school and decided to open in a hybrid model
 - Teachers and parents have expressed concerns about classroom culture if some kids are wearing masks and others are not. One of the only ways to prevent this from happening is to have a universal policy that applies to everyone.

- New policy recommendation: **In accordance with CDC and MDH recommendations, all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to River Grove are required to wear face coverings, regardless of vaccination status, while indoors.** Masks will not be required outdoors unless kids are in close physical proximity. Waivers will be allowed for students with documented health conditions, disabilities, mental health needs, developmental or behavioral needs. Documentation from a licensed Health Provider must accompany the waiver. Previous waivers will not be honored at this time. The school will consider reinstating these waivers once community transmission returns to “moderate” or “low” level, as defined by the CDC.
- Board discussion
 - Bruns would like to see the school providing good fitting masks and ensuring that students are cleaning and changing their masks regularly
 - Ost – what about face shields? River Grove has a supply of those as well.
 - Goodson is also worried about transmission of other diseases such as flu and RSV if children are not practicing proper mask hygiene
 - Beck – do we want to set a level at which we could be comfortable returning to the previously approved mask policy?
 - Goodson would prefer to wait to see how things go first. A big determining factor will also be when vaccinations become available for young children.
 - Bruns – does a vaccinated teacher need to quarantine if there is a positive COVID case in their class?
 - No. Only if they have symptoms or are not vaccinated.
 - Hansen asked Dochniak what St Paul Schools are doing
 - Dochniak – the St. Paul School District policy will be similar to what River Grove is proposing
 - Ost – it is about trying to keep as many kids in school as possible. We are already tight in terms of staffing and don’t have the capacity to provide distance learning the way we did last year
 - Dochniak – St Paul teachers are having to put all of their lessons into SeeSaw and just facilitate the curriculum, in preparation for eventually moving into distance learning.
 - Beck – that wouldn’t work well here at Grove where we are doing project-based, outdoor learning
 - Hardie – do we have a plan yet for what will happen when a child is out on quarantine?
 - Goodson – it is an imperfect plan. The teachers will try their best to get instruction to kids while they are out but we don’t have the resources we did last year to have a designated distance learning teacher. Our enrollment has dropped as a result of COVID and we will likely continue to lose students, so that will make it even harder to fund higher staffing levels
 - Beck thanked parents for attending the meeting and sharing their opinions respectfully.
 - Hansen also spoke about the kindness and respectfulness of emails sent by parents. We are a small school where everyone knows each other. Sense of community is important.
 - Bruns – if there is a positive COVID case, are we just trusting teachers to have enforced proper mask wearing?
 - Goodson – yes. And the COVID-response team has talked with teachers to ensure that they will be monitoring proper mask wearing and hygiene.
 - Ost – last year we got 700 masks with clear inserts for students to be able to see mouths and learn speech properly
 - Hansen – being outdoors will help a lot and this will give teachers extra incentive to

- get kids out as much as possible.
- Question from parent – will kids be distanced when outside? Or required to wear masks when in close proximity outside? There is some evidence of outdoor transmission with the delta variant
 - Answer – yes
 - Ost – are there any other questions? If not, she is seeking a motion to approve the policy presented by staff.
 - Bruns – is there additional PTO available to teachers and staff if they get sick or need to quarantine?
 - Goodson - the school will attempt to make accommodations but does not have additional COVID support funding assistance like last year
 - Hardie – motion to approve the policy as recommended with a modification of the final bullet to not set a firm time for when this policy will be reconsidered. Second by Bruns. All members voted yes. Motion passes.
 - Ost – will this go into effect on Sept. 2?
 - Hardie – motion to approve the recommended policy, beginning on Sept. 2. Second by Bruns. All members voted yes. Motion passes.

4.0 Next Board of Directors Meeting: September 14, 2021

5.0 Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 7:43pm.