

**Nantucket School Committee
Meeting Minutes
February 23, 2022**

Present Members: Chair Tim Lepore, Vice Chair Pauline Proch, Laura Gallagher Byrne, Esmeralda Martinez and Anthony Fox. Also present from the Studio, a NCTV Representative. This meeting is an in-person participation meeting in compliance with Governor Charles Baker's statement allowing public bodies the ability to hold a meeting at a physical location that is open to the public, without requiring to provide alternative means of remote access. A motion was made by Laura Gallagher Byrne, seconded by Pauline Proch, and approved unanimously, to open the Meeting, and which was called to order at 6:00 PM in the Nantucket High School LGI, by Chair Timothy Lepore.

Comments from the Public

Bobby Planzer, NHS Student asked School Committee to extend the mask mandate until March 7. Community member/Parent Toby Brown asked the School Committee to end the mask mandate on February 28, the same day the mandate will end per Governor Charles Baker. He said adults are not wearing masks, the Town of Nantucket no longer requires masks, please leave the option to individuals. Erin MacVicar, NHS Music teacher asked the School Committee to please lift the mandate, on behalf of her students as performers, seeing faces and facial expressions is vital to the art of performance and if any mandate extension is put in place, please lift it prior to the opening night of the Spring Musical on March 17th. NHS Student's Quinn Keating and Ian Williams both asked the School Committee to end the mandate on February 28 citing it has been 2 years since they have seen their peers faces, understanding the set back with the variants of COVID but now is time to remove the masks. Master Williams was sensitive to thought about bullying about COVID or the wearing a mask or not, but feels this is not an issue and will not happen in school. Student Council Representative Kathryn Kyomitmaitee stated despite her comfort in continuing to wear a mask, she too thinks it is time to remove the mandate. There were multiple outbursts from the audience in favor of no more mask mandate.

Presentations and discussions of interest to the Committee

School Committee Discussion – Extending the Mask Mandate at Nantucket Public Schools

Chair Timothy Lepore asked for the percentage of vaccinated in schools and turned to Superintendent Elizabeth Hallett to provide the statistics. Dr. Hallett reported: 29% NES, 35% NIS, 65% CPS, 80+% NHS of students are vaccinated and while information is not formally gathered on the staff percentages, a guess is approximately 85%. The School Committee had differing opinions about the potential extension of the mask mandate and shared information they had discerned from constituents in their fold. Mrs. Laura Gallagher Byrne is in favor of ending the mask mandate. She stated reading and following empirical data shows that masks do not work and they have contributed to hefty learning loss and social emotional issues. Dr. Lepore agreed while he is in favour of getting rid of the masks, he also thinks extending the mandate for a week after the return of vacation (many families are traveling) is a good timeline to consider. Mrs. Esmeralda Martinez is in favor of ridding the masks but agrees extending for a week is a smart route. Vice Chair Pauline Proch asked for more information from the Superintendent and was curious about recent surveys sent out to the staff. Superintendent Hallett communicated there had been two surveys that circulated from the NTA to the Teaching staff resulting in 199 responses, 64% said to end the mandate, 36% said to continue with the masks. A slightly different survey that optioned a timeline had 45% wanting to extend the mandate for a week after returning from the Winter Break. Dr. Hallett furthered the vacations and breaks from school have illustrated the possibility of a spike (as we had previously seen with December/January breaks after staff and students had been out of school). Dr. Hallett also offered the Board of Health Director Roberto Santamaria expressed the mask mandate could be an optional choice and he did not see a reason to extend. With this information, Mrs. Proch said the timing is difficult and it is challenging to make everyone happy. She wished to confirm PPE Gear, K-195 masks and any other accommodations for those staff who request this, would still be available and Dr. Hallett assured her this is true. Mr. Anthony Fox stated he has spoken to NHS students and Boys & Girls Club students and staff and everyone agrees they want the "masks off". He thought aloud perhaps one or two weeks of any extension would be helpful.

Dr. Hallett provided the School Committee with ***Policy EBCFA – Face Masks***, Adopted in September of 2020, and offered an ***Amended Policy EBCFA*** noting some updates and changes suggested by Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) to the existing policy, and following along the state Department of Public Health guidelines. Dr. Hallett asked to have this for a vote at the next meeting March 22, 2022.

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Committee Discussion and Votes to be Taken

Vote to Extend the Mask Mandate

Vice Chair Pauline Proch asked for a motion for discussion purposes, *“To continue wearing masks in school for one week after vacation through March 14, 2022.”* Dr. Lepore made the motion, Esmeralda Martinez seconded. Mrs. Byrne does not agree, stating this extension is ‘absurd’ and does not seem sensible. Dr. Lepore asked for a definitive motion for a vote *“To wear masks for one week in school after vacation is over, wearing masks through March 14, 2022”*. Dr. Lepore, Mrs. Proch, Mrs. Martinez and Mr. Fox were in favor of the extension, Mrs. Byrne was not, with no abstentions, the motion carried 4-1.

There was much dissention from the public community members. One member stated aloud their dislike that the district did not survey the parents nor the students and ask their opinion on the extension, only those feelings of the staff and the union.

Horizon

The next meeting will be March 22nd, 2022 .

At 6:39pm, the School Committee adjourned on a motion made by Laura Gallagher Byrne, seconded by Pauline Proch, and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Logan O’Connor
School Committee Clerk