

Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School

Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes – Wednesday, February 16th, 2022, 6:30 pm

- Location:** HCCPS and Zoom
- Present:** In-person: Kate Saccento, Matt Dube, Kathleen Szegda, Kate Ewall, Lara Ramsey, Chris Korczak, Rashida Krigger, Kathleen Hulton, Emily Boddy, Tala Elia
By Zoom: Marguerite Durant, Sara Schieffelin, Daniel Klatz, Rich Senecal, Joe Wyman
- Regrets:** None
- Facilitator:** Matt
- Notetaker:** Kathleen H
- Guests:** By Zoom: Beth Adel, Cait Brown, Bill Sweet, Catherine P, Christina Collins, Dawn Reesman, Cynthia, Ben Carlis, Dawn Graichen-Moore, Ed Welch, Emilie Woodward, Kirsten Bringardner, Jenn, Gabrielle Hartley, Gina Wyman, Helen Korzcak, James Boddy, Jenn, Joanna Morse, Jodi Shaw, Katherine Aleo, Kerri Simonelli, Martha Hoopes, Rosehill Family, Rebecca Rose-Langston, Seth, Meg Taylor, Melissa Flanders, Meredith M, Myssie Casinghino, Nicole Grinaski, Nina, Noelle Barrist Stern, Patti Mars-Senecal, Rebecca BelcherTimme, Sara Lunt, Sarah’s iPhone, Tiffany Ross, Stephanie’s iPhone, Tiffany and Rob Winhoven (Morgan), Valerie Gintis, Zemelsky-Bonn, Valerie Gintis, Cecilia Darby, Zoom user, Sam, Rachel Maiore, A Carter Bent, Neal Teague, jd, Sam, Michaela Litzner
In person: Mary Price, Tom Hoogendyk
- List keeper:** Chris
- Timekeeper:** Matt
- Mission statement read by:** Emily

Topic	Discussion	Action (if necessary)
Announcements, appreciations, acknowledgements	Shared agreements were reviewed, reminders that we have different opinions and should be respectful of difference, and try to be empathetic.	
Public Comment	Public comments were shared via zoom. A teacher shared that her partner has had COVID for six weeks and is not getting better and that many people are feeling the pandemic is over and in her house it is not, and there is a lot we don’t know about the pandemic. The coronavirus is changing quickly, data is new, we are making best guesses, she urges safety over riskiness. She urges the continuation of the mask mandate.	

	<p>A parent shared his concerns about ending the mask mandate, especially because only a month ago N95s were recommended. Appreciation for the Health and Safety committee was expressed.</p> <p>A second parent is worried about ending the mask mandate as quickly as the plan outlines, although she is pleased with the thoughtfulness of the plan. She wonders what the metric is that we will determine when it is time for the mask-optional plan.</p> <p>A third parent shared that he is concerned about his younger unvaccinated children, and expressed that masks are shown to be effective. He urged that the youngest people in the Hilltown community and Easthampton should be vaccinated first and that masks are less inconvenient than spikes in the virus.</p> <p>A fourth parent expresses extreme gratitude for the Health and Safety committee for their extra work. She noted that parents on the committee are three health experts with regards to COVID and Hilltown is getting 10,000s of dollars of free labor. She expressed that the community should show respect when we speak to them, and noted that during last week's BOT meeting there were some points where respect was not shown. She also noted that masked in-person school is a lot better than remote school, and that remote schooling was very hard for her family.</p> <p>A fifth parent is of two minds. Was excited about getting rid of the masks, and was swayed by other risks to childhood/life. If this is our last surge then she felt like the community could wait longer to unmask, but there is a part of her that believes in cyclical masking and feels horrible about the idea of children being in masks for years. She worried about the worst possible outcome of remote schooling if too many teachers are out. She reiterated she is on the fence, but it would be nice for kids to have a sense of normalcy - masks are a constant reminder of the anxiety.</p> <p>A sixth parent expressed her general sense of happiness with the proposal - this is the right and good thing to do. Fatality rates for children are low and children are not huge disease vectors. She urges the Board to allow Hilltown students to grow, learn and play unencumbered. She expressed that it is tragic that some children prefer masks now. She stressed the fear and the false sense of security that masks bring, and stressed her belief that masks harm children. Urged the BoT to accept the proposal and make masks optional.</p> <p>A seventh parent who is also a teacher knows multiple teachers who have contracted COVID while masked</p>	
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	<p>with unmasked students. She asks the Board to stay cautious, and states we do not need to be at the forefront of the change to unmask. Expressed her belief that lifting the mask mandate is “self-first” not “community-first”. COVID is still going through her school and she noted “mask-optional” is an ableist policy and is an equity issue. She sees anxiety among kids is high and thinks students know they are safer with masks. Masks help with COVID safety and anxiety. COVID is affecting students because of staffing issues. She shared that her son’s IEP is not being met because of staffing issues. Hilltown is doing its best, but if Covid makes staffing worse, it will mean Hilltown is not doing its best to meet her son’s needs. She expressed it is elitist to push ahead of local communities, and that it would be better to bring back other things like chorus ahead of mask-optional.</p> <p>An eighth parent says it is not the right time to remove masks. Numbers and trends are not stable enough to make this decision, and that it would be better to wait until the spring with open windows and other mitigation strategies and urged Hilltown to stay the course with masks.</p> <p>A ninth parent stated that none of us like to mask, and that her family does it for the community. It’s important to prioritize the health and safety of teachers and staff. She also supports the current proposal and appreciates its flexibility to adjust as changes occur. She thanked the H&S committee for their hard work.</p> <p>A tenth parent appreciates the direction of the H&S committee, and notes the recommendations are coming from medical experts and we should respect that. He states that Omicron brings different risks and that the risks that Omicron brings are on par with the flu, and stresses that this is not a fringe position but a mainstream one. He states that in the UK children have not been masked. He states that there is evidence that one-way masking works. We are in a different place in this pandemic. He is curious about the authority of the Easthampton mandate over schools. Recommends someone from HT Board advocates at 2/22 Easthampton Board of Health meeting. He states that he does not believe this is an individual-first decision to go mask optional because it will help our community and help children and address a culture of fear.</p> <p>An eleventh parent is in support of the mask optional proposal. She has prioritized wellness for her family in this pandemic. Children are not the most at risk of</p>	
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	<p>disease and not big vectors of transmission. Other districts in MA (she says 62) have mask waivers. She stated her belief we can work out a way to respect all choices regarding masks at Hilltown.</p> <p>A twelfth parent is concerned about masked vs unmasked students and the creation of two groups of students. Children of families who think masks are important might be scared. Having two groups of students may set up a situation of inequity and possible bullying.</p> <p>Matt read a letter from Prism’s student who urged going mask-optional and shared that it is hard to wear masks, and that she doesn’t want to wear masks. Life is about living, and she believes in the right to choose. Children are bearing the brunt of adult decisions.</p>	
<p>Masking Policy Plan from Health + Safety (Discussion + Decision)</p>	<p>The Health and Safety Committee shared their proposal for the masking policy plan.</p> <p>With regards to data on case numbers, there is statewide fall of the omicron surge. In Hampshire country there were 854 cases in the last week, and it was noted over 50% are likely from UMass.</p> <p>With regards to hospitalizations, the healthcare system was overwhelmed in this surge. Hospitalizations are coming down but are still quite high. Baystate Hospital has still been overcapacity, it is very hard to transfer out of Cooley Dickinson Hospital, because Baystate is still so much at capacity.</p> <p>H&S has been discussing when is the best time to move to Mask Optional for quite some time, and these numbers make it clear that this is not the time to roll back masks.</p> <p>H&S members have been on the frontlines of COVID and wish to state that there has been rampant misinformation that they would like to address- risk to children is not 0; risk to children is real and long-term effects are not known; CO2 levels do not rise to dangerous levels when masked. The committee has been questioned a lot and they have tried to be transparent, and have done many things including hosted forums, tried to be thorough, and looked at many studies. They have come up with this proposal not because they think what we have done in the past is wrong, but given the information we have now this is the right direction to move.</p>	<p>Matt Dube motioned to approve the plan as amended with two revisions; Chris Korczak seconded; the plan as amended was approved by consensus.</p>

	<p>They noted some exceptions to the mask optional proposal: on buses which is a federal law; in the nurse's office; and while still in quarantine period. Hilltown has a 91% vaccination rate and has different layers of mitigation: vaccines to 5-11 year olds, increased testing availability, effective treatments are more available.</p> <p>Due to increased risk of transmission, masks are recommended for unvaccinated people. In the proposal as it stands, this would be a strong recommendation but not a requirement.</p> <p>Easthampton Board of Health has a town mask mandate - H&S committee has confirmed with the Director of Easthampton Dept of Health, school council and other school committees who have confirmed that local board of health mandates have jurisdiction over individual schools' decisions.</p> <p>Board member raises the question of the efficacy of one-way making. What constitutes proper one-way masking? The H and S committee answered that wearing an N95 all of the time, not taking it down, etc, helps increase efficacy. They noted that two way masking is still safer than proper one-way masking.</p> <p>Board member has questions about implementation and also wants to hear about the teacher meeting that happened yesterday. Where is the staff on this? Staffing is a huge concern, the quality of the school starts to fall apart if teachers are out.</p> <p>Administrator Kate Saccento said that 30 staff members came to the meeting and the meeting was extremely informative, H and S member Tala Elia was present and answered many questions. Kate reported she did not hear any huge concerns from any of the staff regarding the policy. Various questions were raised but Kate's impression was that prior to the meeting, there were some questions about Easthampton jurisdiction and about unvaccinated individuals, but there were not significant concerns shared at the meeting. There were people who voiced some concerns about small children and people at risk, some concerns about what lunch will look like, and concerns about implementation more than direct opposition to the policy.</p>	
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	<p>Board member Emily Boddy raised the issue of Easthampton jurisdiction - she states that in April 2021 Hilltown followed DESE on outdoor masking, not Easthampton guidelines at that time. Kate said that the school's counsel said to ask Easthampton Department of Health and Kate did, and that she said Easthampton says that they do have jurisdiction. Easthampton BOH has a meeting on 2/22. Emily asked if the school can advocate with the Board of Health to allow us to be mask optional.</p> <p>Health and Safety member Tala Elia does not advise advocating at the Board of Health in Easthampton as a Board.</p> <p>Board Member Chris asked if there have been outbreaks in schools without masks. Sara says anecdotally there was an outbreak in Longmeadow after lifting the mask mandate and masking was then reimposed.</p> <p>Board Member Joe asks if there is a specific case number that the Health and Safety committee is looking - Tala says that we are at Substantial (Low Moderate Substantial High), and we would want us to be out of substantial, 50 cases/100000, before we lift the mandate. Kathleen S. wants to see sustained decline but we need context to the numbers as well (as noted above 50% of recent cases are from UMass)..</p> <p>Board member Dan Klatz expressed discomfort in any official representative of Hilltown weighing in at the Easthampton Department of Public Health meeting. He noted last week, BOT said we wanted to hear H&S committee and hear from some teachers, and he feels satisfied that those things have happened. People in our school have put in time and energy to craft recommendations, he thinks this recommended proposal is sound and should be adopted. He suggests that if there are changes, or anything happens, the H&S committee should take that revision to the Board at the next Board meeting, he states his belief that policy like this is the job of the Board and he thinks it is important that the proposal goes forward. He had one proposal for a modification which the BOT team crafted to state: <i>“Time-sensitive changes in mitigation strategies/school practices that are directed by the Health and Safety Team will be revisited by the Board at the next opportunity if they impact policy (as opposed to implementation practice).”</i></p>	
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	<p>Health and Safety committee member Tala Elia asked for clarification about the extent to which Dan thinks the Board needs to be involved. Dan clarified that Board should be involved in policy and not implementation.</p> <p>Rashida Krigger points out that there is a lack of clarity about what we do if the parameters are not met and thinks the vagueness is a reflection that this is not the time to lift masks. Tala Elia says that the proposal is a projection, and that H&S could delay implementation if numbers point in that direction.</p> <p>Board member Joe Wyman brought up issues of masks and bullying related issues. How possible will it be to enforce visitor masks? Admin Lara Ramsey says that she thinks it will be possible to enforce situational mask mandates. She takes the conflict between family values and difference of school culture seriously and believes in teachers' ability to navigate this. She states that variation in mask wearing outside seems a non-issue, and this is a hopeful sign. She thinks we can teach to it. Teachers want to prioritize the greater good of the community. Kate agreed. They believe that this is possible. Rashida says that we did a lot to teach students that differences are okay, but that there still can be conflicts. She remembers that school is meant to be a three legged stool and we need to make sure families do their part to make sure that the school works.</p> <p>Board member Emily Boddy raises questions about days 6-10 after symptoms of COVID. Answer: If you have symptoms, you need to mask. Emily asks why there would be masks with symptoms and what about children in the 90 day period when they would still test positive? She asks what exactly the rules of masking for symptoms are. The H and S committee states that the nurse would have discretion. Emily says she thinks there needs to be clarity. The H&S committee says that the 6-10 days are positive Covid cases only, symptomatic masking is for the length of the symptoms only. Emily states she believes stop-and-start masking is destabilizing for kids. She also points out there are resources for families who need extra mitigation and wonders if there are ways to provide information to these people.</p>	
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	<p>Lara thinks we should have a discussion as a board to consider March 14th instead of March 7th as the target date for the policy to go into effect. H&S agree with 3/14 as a modification.</p> <p>Dan wants to speak to process questions raised about H&S committee and the Board. He thinks we need to be explicit about undercurrents that go into Board decision making, and reiterated his opinion that the Board needs to ratify big policy changes.</p> <p>Kathleen H. urges we empathize with people who hold different opinions in a strong dominant culture towards masking where differing opinions are vilified so strongly.</p> <p>Lara says that we may want to consider March 7 as the date for Special Ed. H and S committee member Kate Ewell agrees with March 7 or even earlier. Kathleen S. says the proposal is the 7th as it stands.</p> <p>Expectation is that there will be communication with the staff as there is roll out. Board members discussed the flexibility of implementation.</p> <p>The plan was amended by the BOT (changes in italics):</p> <p><i>We anticipate the implementation of this proposal to begin on 3/7/2022 if case counts and hospitalizations regionally continue to trend precipitously downward, as currently projected. The Health and Safety team may pause or revoke this policy, reverting to masking, in the event of changes in the evolution of the virus that are determined to pose a substantial increase in risk. Time-sensitive changes in mitigation strategies/school practices that are directed by the Health and Safety Team will be revisited by the Board at the next opportunity if they impact policy (as opposed to implementation practice).</i> Additionally, as Hilltown falls under the jurisdiction of the City of Easthampton’s mask mandate, this proposal would only go into effect if the Easthampton mask mandate is lifted or otherwise modified to exclude schools.</p>	
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Meeting Wrap-Up/ Evaluation	Next Meeting: Wednesday March 9th, 2022 at 6:30 p.m. in-person and on Zoom Facilitator: Kathleen S. Snacks: XX Drinks: XX Newsletter blurb: XX	
Review Action Items	Reviewed action items.	<p>Health and Safety Committee will revise the proposal.</p> <p>Administration will send out revised the proposal to the community.</p> <p>Clerk will file revised proposal.</p>
Adjournment	Meeting adjourned at 8:38 p.m.	Kathleen Szegda motioned to adjourn; Kate Ewall seconded; the meeting was adjourned.

Tentative Agenda Topic for the March 9th, 2022 Board Meeting: revisit Personnel proposal