

The Board of Education, Downers Grove Grade School District 58, DuPage County, Illinois met in special session on Thursday, February 10, 2022, at the Downers Grove Village Hall. The meeting was live streamed for the public on the Village of Downers Grove YouTube channel.

1. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

The President called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. and announced that it was a special meeting of the District 58 Board of Education. Present at the meeting: President Darren Hughes; Vice President Gregory Harris; Members Melissa Ellis, Emily Hanus, Steve Olczyk, and Tracy Weiner. Members absent: Kirat Doshi. Also in attendance were Kevin Russell, Superintendent; Jayne Yudzentis, Assistant Superintendent for Personnel; Justin Sisul, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; James Eichmiller, Assistant Superintendent for Technology and Learning; Jessica Stewart, Assistant Superintendent for Special Services; Todd Drafall, Assistant Superintendent for Business/CSBO; Sonali Patil, Manager of Business Services; Kevin Barto, Director of Buildings and Grounds; Megan Hewitt, Community Relations Coordinator; and Melissa Jerves, Board Secretary.

2. FLAG SALUTE

President Hughes led the flag salute.

3. SUPERINTENDENT REPORT

Dr. Russell began his presentation with an overview of current COVID-19 mitigations. The key factors guiding the District's recommendations are health and safety of students and staff, prioritization of in person instruction, a continued path to normalcy, rigorous instructional opportunities, social-emotional needs of students, supporting students and staff, and parental choice. In light of the ambiguous court ruling in the Sangamon County circuit court regarding mask mandates, the District has consulted with its attorneys, insurance carriers, and the health department to answer key questions. As a result, the administration is recommending that the Board approve a resolution permitting a mask optional policy in schools beginning February 14, so long as court rulings or state mandates do not prevent implementation.

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

Angelique Stacy expressed her thanks to the Board and Dr. Russell for listening to parents and the community.

Dana Cox, Belle Aire attendance area, commented that families should be able to

make their own choice regarding masking.

Meggen McKenzie, Kingsley attendance area, noted that her children have anxiety and speech delays that have been exacerbated by pandemic isolation and mask wearing.

Mark Fyllum, Pierce Downer attendance area, expressed support for masks being optional. He stated that studies do not show that masks have been a successful preventive measure and finds the state guidance unreasonable.

Josh Hearne, Pierce Downer attendance area, commented that it is worrisome that young learners are being affected by COVID mitigations. First grade test scores have suffered; students need to see teachers' faces to build social skills and learn speech.

Sara Roussin, Highland attendance area, commented on the implications of bullying regarding masking, and noted that parents and educators have an opportunity to model and teach respectful behavior.

Rebekah Padalik, Lester attendance area, noted that children are least vulnerable to COVID and asked for an end to the mask mandate.

Makayla Cotter, Herrick seventh grader, commented that students are not wearing masks correctly, and masks make it hard to breathe and hard to tell what people are saying or how they are feeling.

Brad Dreisbach, Lester attendance area, commented that when the District moves to a mask optional policy, people need to be respectful of others' choices, and acknowledge that people have different value systems about risk and different assessments of costs and benefits.

Ryan Ohman, Lester attendance area, noted that the Board has a difficult job balancing education needs with safety. However, vaccines are widely available and masking has gone on too long and is negatively impacting the children's wellbeing.

Lisa Hinsberger, Lester attendance area, stated that she does not see the benefit to masking her children any longer. There is a protective vaccine and we know about the protectiveness of one-way masking.

Debby Robertson, Hillcrest attendance area, stated that the last two years have been stressful for all, especially students. She commented that there is no data that masks in school have an effect on community spread of COVID.

Jamie Sparger commented on weighing the costs of masking to children's mental health against the risks of COVID.

Carrie Antonopoulos noted that other nations have not masked children and there

is no meaningful difference in the spread of COVID. Vaccines are available and one-way masking with a high quality mask provides protection against COVID.

Rebecca Adelman, Whittier attendance area, commented that masking has created long-term consequences for children and society because children have learned to conform rather than challenge rules.

Brian Sewell, Whittier attendance area, stated that his daughter decided to attend school without a mask and was segregated in the library to do her schoolwork.

Kathleen Ramsey, Henry Puffer attendance area, stated that she spoke on behalf of District teachers who fear speaking up, and asked the District to stop enforcing vaccination or weekly testing for teachers.

Shon Lo commented that she agrees with the Superintendent's recommendation. Though COVID-19 transmission is high everywhere in the country, the pediatric positive case count does not correlate with high numbers of hospitalization.

Meghan Landers commented that she feels fortunate to be a part of the District and has had responsive and respectful interactions. She stated that we cannot wait for clear guidance when children are suffering learning loss and mental health issues.

Mike Allendorf expressed support for a mask optional policy, stating if not now, when?

Kim Breier, Kingsley attendance area, said that while she has been trusted to raise thousands of dollars for the District, she is not trusted to decide what is right for her own children. She does not suggest removal of all mitigations, but is in support of a mask optional policy.

An adult read a statement from a nine-year-old student who went to school without a mask because spelling is hard when he/she cannot see the teachers and classmates saying words.

Lindsay Garrity described her preschooler's difficulties with speech and said that masks make the problem worse and prevent him from speaking at all. To some children and families, masking is not a small inconvenience.

Matthew Kulp commented that some families will have a hard time with a mask optional policy and some children will still have to go to school with masks due to their own or a family member's health condition. He asked everyone to be kind and not judge.

Shantel Smith, a former District 58 parent, commented that data shows that the death rate is not decreased by the mask mandate. Parents should assess their child's risk and the freedom of choice needs to be preserved.

Barbara Allen thanked Dr. Russell for his leadership. She commented on the constant “mask theater” occurring in the middle schools regarding enforcement of mask wearing and social distancing.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

A. Potential Action to Authorize Suspension of Enforcement of Certain COVID Mitigation Measures to the Extent Consistent with Court Rulings

Member Harris moved and Member Olczyk seconded the motion to adopt the Resolution Authorizing Suspension of Enforcement of Certain COVID-19 Mitigation Measures to the Extent Consistent with Court Rulings and Approving Superintendent’s Authority Related to Pandemic Operations for the 2021-2022 school year.

The Board discussed the logistics of implementing a mask optional policy, as well as the strong opinions in the community on both sides of the issue. The COVID dashboard on the District’s website will continue to be updated.

ROLL CALL VOTE: AYES: Members Harris, Hughes, Olczyk and Weiner
NAYS: Members Ellis and Hanus Motion carried

6. ADJOURNMENT

Member Harris moved and Member Weiner seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting.

ROLL CALL VOTE: AYES: Members Ellis, Hanus, Harris, Hughes, Olczyk and Weiner
NAYS: None Motion carried

The meeting was adjourned at 6:59 p.m.

Darren Hughes, President

Melissa Jerves, Secretary