

BEDFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE

August 18, 2021

Live Virtual Online Meeting using Zoom™ Audio/Video Conference Software

*** Due to the Covid-19 Crisis, this meeting was live-streamed over the internet using Zoom™ video/audio conferencing software in order to adhere with social distancing measures put in place by Governor Baker. This meeting was open to the public for live chat during Public Comment.*

1. Call to Order

At 7:01 p.m., Ms. Scoville called to order the meeting of the Bedford School Committee. Other members present included Mr. Brosgol, Ms. Guay, Ms. Santiago and Mr. Morrison; each member stated their name in a roll call attendance.

2. Comments from Public

*Shannon Zickler
Springs Road*

Ms. Zickler expressed concern about students returning to school without masks. She encouraged the School Committee and the Board of Health to consider scientific data and where the numbers are heading, noting that there are 1,254 cases in Middlesex County alone. Ms. Zickler said that cases in children continue to climb and that children 12 and under cannot be vaccinated yet and they are the most vulnerable. She encourages the School Committee and the BOH to require masks for the start of the school year.

*Robin Steele
Jeffrey Circle*

Ms. Steele spoke about a personal experience and believes that emotions can be missed behind a mask. She mentioned she would like to see snack time reinstated at Bedford High School and hopes that school leadership will consider this.

*Phil Prince
South Road*

Mr. Prince started by thanking the School Committee for their efforts throughout the year and putting the safety of the students and faculty first. He encouraged the School Committee to continue to look at the data from the CDC, the American Academy of Pediatrics and listen to the experts while making their decision on mask wearing. Mr. Prince urged the School Committee to consider mandating masks and vaccines for students and staff.

*Stacey Katz
Temple Terrace*

Ms. Katz agreed that the School Committee should consider a mask mandate and referenced recommendations by the CDC. She noted that surrounding communities were making masks mandatory for the start of the school year and mentioned that if students were given an option to wear masks; their opinions may be swayed by peer pressure. Ms. Katz requests the continuation of cohort lunches, social distancing and encouraged vaccination for students and staff.

*Holly Munsie
Lexington Circle*

Ms. Munsie said that she is in favor of universal masking. She noted recommendations from the CDC as well as the American Association of Pediatrics and mentioned that the risk for young students is high and the Delta variant is a much more contagious strain. Ms. Munsie said that there is no way to determine which students are vaccinated and no practical way to enforce vaccination.

*Julie Sandell
Curve Street*

Ms. Sandell is in support of a mask mandate for staff and students. Ms. Sandell said that there were over 45K children hospitalized due to Covid-19 over the past few months and 542 children had died from Covid. She said that the long term effects are not known at this time and believes that mask wearing and social distancing can help stop the spread.

*Christy Martin
Selfridge Road*

Ms. Martin expressed her surprise that there are residents that still wish to keep masks optional. She said that her husband is an essential worker who contracted COVID-19 and still suffers from some of the side effects. Ms. Martin is an advocate for a mask mandate in school as well as pool testing. She would like to see a contingency plan for learning in the event that the spread of COVID-19 gets worse.

*David and Eileen Feldman
Hancock Street*

Mr. Feldman believes strongly in universal masking and pool testing. He does not think we should rely on the same steps for the Delta variant as were taken with COVID-19. Mr. Feldman agrees that we should take a safe approach and he encourages the School Committee to give this a lot of thought.

*Pam Adams
Liberty Road*

Ms. Adams also supports universal masking and thinks it is the best way to keep schools open. She spoke about studies conducted at the University of Pittsburgh that show that early masking

helps prevent the spread of the virus. Ms. Adams expressed her concern for younger students who aren't able to get the vaccine.

*Sue Swanson
Shawsheen Road*

Ms. Swanson has two grandchildren who attend Bedford Public Schools and she strongly believes all staff and students should be masked in school. She spoke about how the schools were able to accommodate students with certain food allergies and believes that a small inconvenience for one person may be a lifesaving step for others.

*Elizabeth Cowles
Buehler Road*

Ms. Cowles, a teacher at Bedford Public Schools for over 12 years, spoke on her own behalf noting how proud she is of the way Bedford navigated through the pandemic. She believes that Bedford had the best results compared to other districts in reference to teaching and learning during the pandemic. She recommends that students and staff who are vaccinated should not have to wear masks and noted that at this time, the COVID positive rate in Bedford is lower than the state average.

*Lauren Dowdy
Sunnyfield Road*

Ms. Dowdy said that she believes vaccinations should be required for all school personnel and that all tools available should be used such as masking, distancing and the use of outdoor space.

*Patty Carluccio
Washington Street*

Ms. Carluccio hopes that the Board of Health and Bedford Public Schools will make a decision that is best for families and the community. She does not believe there is any such thing as an abundance of caution and went on to speak about unexpected consequences that occurred in young adults as a result of the pandemic. She asked that decisions not be made in fear and noted that there are many factors to consider. She hopes that athletes will not have to wear masks while participating in outdoor sports.

*Katie Desjardins
Maxwell Road*

Ms. Desjardins would like to see masks mandated in school and believes this is the best way to protect students and staff. She said that wearing masks will also protect students from having to possibly go back to remote learning and asked the School Committee not to wait for a decision from the Governor or DESE but instead make their own decision to require masking in school.

*Doug Horton
Evans Avenue*

Mr. Horton hopes that decisions are made based on facts and data. He encouraged the School Committee to follow state guidelines and he believes that data shows that children are not at risk. Mr. Horton believes that mask wearing may have irreparable damage to students and that parents should have a choice to protect their children holistically.

*Stephanie Keep
Great Road*

Ms. Keep would like to see the school year start off with universal masking for all students and staff. She believes that learning in person is much more important than optional mask wearing. She said that a COVID outbreak in a classroom would cause a disruption in learning. Ms. Keep agrees with a vaccination requirement for staff and thinks this is a small thing to ask to keep students and staff safe. She noted that the only exception to masking should be in special circumstances.

*Michaela McCormack
Evergreen Avenue*

Ms. McCormack thanked the School Committee for their hard work through the pandemic. She agrees with a mask mandate for students and staff in an indoor environment and encouraged the School Committee to consider. Ms. McCormack believes that a crowded playground may also warrant mask wearing. She mentioned that the MTA supports mandatory vaccines for staff as well as testing.

*Kelly Horton on behalf of Leslie Savoy
Fayette Road*

Ms. Horton read a letter prepared by Ms. Savoy. Ms. Savoy wrote of her special needs preschool child who was missing social cues due to masking. She noted that her child struggles with communication while wearing a mask and that the students who participated in the ESY program as well as the summer camp in Bedford, were not required to wear masks. Ms. Horton spoke of the low positivity rates in Bedford and said that Ms. Savoy could claim a medical exemption for her child not to have to wear a mask, but this isn't an option for all students.

*Rebecca Grossman
Sweeney Ridge Road*

Ms. Grossman appreciates all of the hard work that the School Committee has done. She agrees that learning should be in person. She thinks that the main three things to focus on are safety in the buildings, testing and tracking and preparation for possible at home learning. Ms. Grossman would like to see monitoring and testing and believes that decisions should be made using data. Ms. Grossman would like to be sure that Bedford is prepared to support students for at home learning if it becomes necessary.

*James Szabo
Dunster Road*

Mr. Szabo asked that the School Committee follow state guidance. He believes that masking should be optional and he is appalled that students should be asked to wear masks. Mr. Szabo said that he thinks mask wearing is illegal and that they are being worn improperly.

*Sanjay Raja
Robinson Road*

Mr. Raja started by thanking the School Committee. He went on to speak about CDC describing the Delta variant as 50% more contagious than COVID-19 and other diseases. He said that 50% of all US COVID hospitalizations are children under 12 years of age and that we are not sure of long term side effects. Mr. Raja reiterated that the newer strains are not the same as the earlier COVID strains and that as of August 2, 2021 only 65% of Bedford residents were vaccinated.

*Jessica Brommelhoff
Wildwood Drive*

Ms. Brommelhoff began by thanking the panel. She said that her child has a respiratory infection and she is very concerned about mask wearing. Ms. Brommelhoff spoke about studies on vaccine effectiveness and noted the potential long term consequences of neurological effects of COVID.

*Katie O'Connor
Radcliffe Circle*

Ms. O'Connor would like to see the School Committee align with DESE where masks would not be required in school. She does not agree that all students can adapt to wearing a mask and asked how a decision would be made if Bedford did not choose to follow the DESE guidance.

*Laura McLeod
Glenridge Drive*

Ms. McLeod agrees with universal masking at the very least, in the Davis and Lane Elementary schools. She believes keeping an in person learning environment is most important. Ms. McLeod loves the idea of pool testing and encourages the use of the nasal test.

*Sanjay (No last name provided)
6000 Thompson Farm*

Sanjay does not believe that masks protect people. He talked about his concern that his children are breathing carbon dioxide all day if they are wearing masks. He believes it is a huge burden on young people and would like to see the mask as an option in school.

Kara Currier

Middlesex Road

Ms. Currier spoke about the positive impact that the vaccine has had and that we all have the duty of responsibility to protect family members. She agrees that Bedford should follow the guidance of the CDC as well as the American Association of Pediatrics.

Gayatri Yadavalli
Hayden Lane

Ms. Yadavalli supports universal masking in school with the exception of medical needs. She believes from a public health standpoint, non-masking is an opportunity for the Delta variant to morph which would make the vaccines less effective to these variants. She believes that we need to clamp down on community spread to prevent further mutations of the virus. Ms. Yadavalli also supports community testing.

Mark Levitan
Fern Way

Mr. Levitan supports masking in school and does not believe that it is much of an inconvenience. He spoke of his two young children including his first grader who wore masks without issue in the previous school year. He asked that parents keep their children home when they are feeling sick to help prevent any spread.

Erin Sandler-Rathe
Hume Road

Ms. Sandler-Rathe is in favor of a mask mandate. She mentioned that she is concerned about 11 year old students who cannot be vaccinated that will attend JGMS. Ms. Sandler-Rathe said that masks may not be as protective as biohazard gear but they do provide a layer of protection.

Marybeth Heath
Sorens Way

Ms. Heath believes Bedford should do as possible to protect staff and students. She noted that wearing masks and pool testing seemed to have worked well and also suggested nasal testing for pool testing.

Sarah Sjostrom
Old Stagecoach Road

Ms. Sjostrom is in favor of masking. She told the School Committee that she is a healthcare professional and that given the data about masking, it behooves us to think cautiously. She said that the Delta variant is highly contagious and is very severe in non-vaccinated people. Ms. Sjostrom urged Bedford to mandate universal masking.

Molly Alamsetti

Thompson Farm

Ms. Alamsetti hopes that Bedford will follow the DESE guidelines and she does not agree with mandatory masking. She said that the studies that she has seen show that cloth masks provide little protection.

*Christine Bolton
Scott Circle, HAFB*

Ms. Bolton shared that she has a compromised immune system and that her children have a lot of anxiety if they are in an environment where people are not wearing masks because they do not want to transmit any illness to their mother. Ms. Bolton believes in “in school” learning and she also agrees with masking and testing. She feels that the Delta variant is much more transmissible and that it is safer to err on the side of caution.

*Donovan Wall
Andrews Circle, HAFB*

Mr. Wall believes that parents should be responsible in determining their own risks. He shared some statistics about H1N1 and the Spanish Flu and does not think testing will have any impact.

*Anne Caron
North Road*

Ms. Caron is fully supportive of universal masking and that it is important to have the correct data. She believes that masks work and talked about carbon monoxide studies being unproven. Ms. Caron said that the parents of younger students who cannot get vaccinated are left without a choice. She said that a slight inconvenience of wearing a mask is a very small price to pay and believes that it should be mandatory for teachers to get vaccinated for in person teaching. She said that decisions should rely on science and medical professionals.

*Elizabeth Berner
Wagon Wheel Drive*

Ms. Berner believes that it is largely irresponsible to send students back to school unmasked. She supports the use of masks, especially at the Davis School and the Lane School. Ms. Berner said that the masks have many benefits and does not believe that last year can be compared to this year considering how much the virus has changed. She said that the virus will continue to change and said that it is crucial to get things right from the start.

*Astrid Kruse
Battle Flagg Road*

Ms. Kruse spoke of her three school aged children saying that only one child is old enough to be vaccinated and has been. She told the School Committee that she is a doctor of veterinary medicine and double masks each day at work. She would like Bedford to follow the guidelines of the medical experts as well as the CDC. Ms. Kruse said that this is not the same infection as it

was a year ago and that we must use current data and listen to the experts. She suggests the KN94 masks and believes all who are eligible should be vaccinated.

Public comment closed at 8:59 p.m.

3. Memorial Bench for Shane Robert Little

Superintendent Conrad presented a letter of donation for a memorial bench donated by Ms. Judith McCabe to be placed on the grounds of Bedford High School in memory of her son, Shane Robert Little. Two six foot all-steel benches would be placed in the area of the basketball court and tennis courts at BHS. Mr. David Manugian of the Bedford Department of Public Works has asked the School Committee for approval for this project since the benches will be placed on school grounds.

Mr. Morrison made the following motion:

MOVED That the School Committee approves the Memorial Bench for Shane Robert Little at Bedford High School

MOTION SECONDED by Mr. Brosgol

MOTION APPROVED 5-0-0

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|--------------|-----|
| Mr. Brosgol | Yes |
| Ms. Guay | Yes |
| Ms. Santiago | Yes |
| Mr. Morrison | Yes |
| Ms. Scoville | Yes |

4. Superintendent Appointment to Collaborative Executive Boards

- EDCO
- CASE
- LABBB

Mr. Conrad asked the School Committee to approve his appointment to the Collaborative Executive Boards for the 2021-2022 school year. Mr. Conrad noted that he also currently sits on the Financial Board for EDCO as well and would continue to do so if appointed.

Ms. Santiago made the following motion:

MOVED That the School Committee approves the appointment of Superintendent Conrad to the Executive Board of EDCO, CASE and LABBB for 2021-2022

MOTION SECONDED by Mr. Morrison

MOTION APPROVED 5-0-0

| | |
|--------------|-----|
| Mr. Brosgol | Yes |
| Ms. Guay | Yes |
| Ms. Santiago | Yes |
| Mr. Morrison | Yes |
| Ms. Scoville | Yes |

5. Superintendent's Report

Mr. Conrad talked about our CASE Collaborative classrooms at the Davis School. He said that we have had three classrooms in prior years but will only have two this year due to space. One classroom will move to Acton for the 2021-2022 school year but we will be back to three in the following year. He said that Mr. Patric Barbieri Jr. recently retired as the executive director of CASE and that Mr. Bill Lupini is acting as the interim executive director.

Mr. Conrad said that EDCO has continued its dissolution and that they are no longer located on Middlesex Turnpike. He said that other collaboratives have absorbed EDCO's services to students and that they are currently extracting themselves from financial obligations. He said that he plans to discuss Bedford's obligations going forward with legal counsel.

Mr. Conrad and Bedford's METCO Director, Akil Mondesir went to Boston to meet with Milly Arbaje-Thomas, the President/CEO at METCO. They discussed changes to the program, enrollment and toured the facility. Mr. Conrad thanked Butch from Bedford Charter who has driven the students in the METCO program for seventeen years and has genuinely gone above and beyond working with METCO families and accommodating the students.

Mr. Conrad also said that he had a great visit with Hanscom Air Force Base and met with the Commander, Colonel Katrina C. Stephens. He talked about Hanscom representation on our board and with the Commander discussed a future meeting of educational leaders from HAFB, Bedford and Lincoln.

Mr. Conrad met with Chief Bongiorno to discuss safety protocols getting to and from school. They discussed alternative drop off spots as well as the safety of bus stops. Mr. Conrad welcomed the new School Resource Officer, Officer James Hunt.

Ms. Scoville called for a five minute break at 9:31 p.m., the meeting resumed at 9:36 p.m.

Mr. Conrad discussed the safety protocols for the opening of school. Bedford has signed up for pool/diagnostic testing and noted that CIC Health in Cambridge will help with testing. Bedford will continue to operate HVAC at higher rates using HEPA filters and MERV filters. Portable air conditioners have been purchased for some of the hotter rooms at JGMS and at Lane. We will continue to disinfect all spaces, make hand sanitizer/PPE available and continue the 3 foot distancing. Mr. Conrad recommended a mask mandate for the opening of schools to the School Committee.

School Committee discussed a timeline to have a vote for a mask mandate as well as the metrics, readiness, planning and policy but the vote is not planned for this evening.

13. Adjournment

Mr. Brosgol made the following motion:

MOVED: Motion to adjourn at 10:17 p.m. not to reopen.

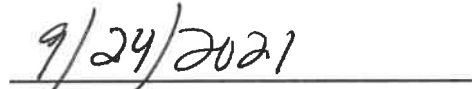
MOTION SECONDED by Ms. Santiago

MOTION APPROVED 5-0-0

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|--------------|-----|
| Mr. Brosgol | Yes |
| Ms. Guay | Yes |
| Ms. Santiago | Yes |
| Mr. Morrison | Yes |
| Ms. Scoville | Yes |



School Committee Secretary



Date

BEDFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE

August 18, 2021

Exhibits/Documents

- McCabe Bench Donation
- Memorial Bench for Shane Robert Little