

**MINUTES OF THE REGIONAL SCHOOL UNIT 1 BOARD MEETING HELD AT MORSE HIGH SCHOOL on August 23, 2021 AT 6:00 PM. (NOTE: These minutes are not official until approved by the Board. Such action, either to approve or amend and approve, is anticipated at the September 27, 2021 meeting).**

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**Members Present:** Stephen August, Chairperson; Lou Ensel, Vice Chairperson; Anita Brown, Jamie Dorr, Bill Perkins, Lorna Ryan and Jennifer Ritch-Smith; Patrick Manuel, Superintendent of Schools

**Others Present:** Katie Joseph, Dean Emmerson, Justin Keleher, Brandon Ward, Jennifer McKay, Ross Berkowitz, Jason Libby, Eric Varney, Tim Harkins, Sandra Gorsuch-Plummer, Julie Kenny, David Richards, Dr. Amina Hanna

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**CALL TO ORDER**

Chairperson August called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

**MOTION:** Ensel

**SECOND:** Ryan

**VOTE:** Board (7-0)

**TO:** Enter into Executive Session pursuant to 1 M.R.S.A. § 405(6)(E) to confer with legal counsel.

**RETURN TO GENERAL SESSION**

The Board returned to General Session at 6:00 pm and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

**COMMENTS FROM THE BOARD CHAIRPERSON**

Chairperson August acknowledged the passing of Delyse Conley who was a long time staff member and secretary at Fisher-Mitchell School as well as a neighbor and friend. Mr. August extended his sympathies to the Conley family.

**MINUTES**

Board member Dorr asked that her comments regarding the new special education program at Morse High School to be added to the June 28, 2021 Board minutes. Ms. Dorr will send some language to be included in the minutes to the Superintendent's Office.

The June 28<sup>th</sup> minutes were revised as follows:

- Include "in-person" public Board meeting in the first sentence of the Comments from the Board Chairperson.
- Under Legislative Update – Page 2, first paragraph – Revised to read "Maine School Management is concerned about loss...."

The August 16<sup>th</sup> minutes were revised as follows:

- Under the Fall Reopening Update – Page 2, last paragraph – Revised the first sentence to read "Dr. Hanna stated that we should be going into the school year thinking that we will hopefully not have to wear masks all year and that this subject will be revisited."

**MOTION:** Ryan

**SECOND:** Dorr

**VOTE:** Board (7-0)

**TO:** Approve the minutes of June 28, 2021 and August 16, 2021 as amended.

## **ADJUSTMENTS**

None

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Woolwich resident Melinda Baxter felt that we are being fed a steady diet of fear and that important decisions should never be made from a place of fear. Ms. Baxter stated that mandating masking is a continuation of the state of fear and provides a false sense of security. Ms. Baxter shared some statistics regarding the number of children that have died from COVID and the number of children that have died from other causes within the same time period with most of those children having severe underlying conditions. Ms. Baxter felt that we should teach our kids ways to support their immune system with simple and inexpensive interventions and tools. Ms. Baxter felt that this is a decision that should be made by parents and not governing bodies and that masks do not prevent transmission and are not as effective as handwashing, etc.

West Bath resident Maureen Craney expressed her concern that she has not heard a lot about what the plan is to support our kids' social and emotional health if masks are required in school. Ms. Craney felt that we lose a piece of communication and connection with individuals when wearing a mask. Ms. Craney hoped that we will see very some definitive plans to support our students socially and emotionally very soon.

Dr. Rok Morin reported that he has seen a lot more patients coming in with headaches, migraines, and breathing concerns over the last year. Dr. Morin stated that there isn't any good controlled clinical data showing the effectiveness of masks. Our kids aren't keeping those masks sterile and they become a breeding ground for bacteria and other issues which is not beneficial to them.

Phippsburg resident Carol Reece asked whether students will be required to wear masks during sporting events and physical education. Ms. Reece stated that there needs to be a better plan with regard to mask breaks and hopes that the Board takes the comments in consideration when making their decision tonight.

Chairperson August reported that the Board received 23 additional comments before the meeting which will be entered into the record of the meeting.

## **MHS BUILDING PROJECT UPDATE**

Superintendent Manuel reported that the Morse High/Bath Tech ribbon cutting ceremony will take place during the week of September 20<sup>th</sup>. Invitations will be going out shortly and any member of the public is welcome to attend. Tours of the building will be offered at the event. Most of the work this summer has been around window testing, acoustical panels in the science and art rooms, and the air exchange in some of the rooms. Site work included putting down crushed stone and other landscaping. The scoreboard has arrived and will be put up in the next couple of weeks.

## **FACILITIES COMMITTEE UPDATE**

Board member Perkins reported that the Facilities Committee met this past week to address several issues and received a presentation from Revision Energy. The presentation gave the committee a complete picture on how we could profit from contracting with this company and how the company is moving forward with solar and renewable energy. The company is asking for a 20 year contract with



the RSU and other districts around the area. The committee studied what was presented and asked Superintendent Manuel to check with other districts that have contracted with this company to get their feedback. Other maintenance issues discussed during the meeting include: 1. Air quality and temperatures at Woolwich Central School which includes air conditioning the classroom portion as well as the staircase with the tower, 2. Boiler at Dike-Newell School – A lot of work has been done to maintain its functionality but David Richards is concerned about its ability to continue functioning, and 3. Phippsburg School continues to have problems with the roof. Mr. Richards only had one summer employee this summer so the amount of work done was not as extensive as previous summers.

The ventilation project at Woolwich and the boiler at Dike-Newell can be done while school is in session. The Phippsburg roof would need to be completed next summer.

Chairperson August suggested that Facilities Director Richards provide the Board with a presentation that prioritizes the projects in the district and where we are on the state list to replace the two elementary schools.

## **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

Superintendent Manuel reported on the following:

- New Staff Orientation will take place on August 31<sup>st</sup> with approximately 15 new professional staff in attendance. All staff will participate in professional development activities on September 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>. Students in grades Kindergarten through grade 9 begin school on September 7<sup>th</sup> and then all students arrive on September 8<sup>th</sup>. PreK students start school on September 13<sup>th</sup>.
- The district currently has two teaching positions, three ed tech positions and one secretarial position that needs to be filled.
- The bus routes are on our website and posted at all of the usual places with contact information for parents. First Student seems to be very well prepared and organized for day one.
- Set for Success will take place on Saturday, August 28<sup>th</sup> from 10:00 – 2:00 at Morse High School. All students and families in the district are invited to attend to receive a backpack and school supplies. Information on community organizations and services will be available for families as well as free haircuts. Dr. Manuel thanked Jamie Dorr and her crew for organizing this wonderful event.
- In June the Board discussed the need for a self-contained program at Morse which will be called the Morse High School Anchor Program. Dr. Manuel reported that the program has been staffed and included a description of the program in the Board's backup.

Board member Dorr asked that some of terms included in the description are tweaked to be more supportive instead of coming from a deficient point of view. Some examples include changing "at risk of being placed in out of district programs" to "identified as potentially needing addition support." The terms "problem behavior" or "disruptive and challenging behaviors" or "emotional disturbance" may be hard for parents or students to read. Ms. Dorr expressed her support of the program and felt that it will be a great success.

## **FINANCIAL REPORT**

Business Manager Debra Clark provided the Board with a financial report for the month ending June 30, 2021 and July 31, 2021 in the Board packet. Superintendent Manuel reported that as of June 30<sup>th</sup>, which is the end of the 2021 fiscal year, the district spent 95.7% of our \$38 million budget. The district ended the year with a balance of \$1.6 million which is a larger carryover amount than normal. Dr. Manuel reviewed the federal grants including how much is in each account and what the funds will be used for this year. The ARP ESSER grant application is due by the end of September and will be discussed later in the meeting.

Assistant Superintendent Joseph reported that the pooled testing company has secured two nurses for the district who will be able to start on September 13<sup>th</sup>.

## REOPENING OF SCHOOL HEALTH AND SAFETY PROTOCOLS

Chairperson August stated that the Board's commitment to the community is to open schools with 100% of our students provided with an in-class educational opportunity this coming year and we will do everything we can to keep the schools open.

Superintendent Manuel reviewed the components of administration's recommended reopening plan to help us open our schools safely this year. The plan will allow us to implement a layer system of strategies to maximize in-person learning and social/emotional support for our students while minimizing disruptions.

- **Prescreening:** Conduct daily self-checks for symptoms or possible exposure to positive cases.
- **Masking:** Masks are required in all indoor settings beginning on **August 25** for all students, staff, and visitors regardless of vaccination status. This includes after-school activities.
  - Masks are required for students, staff, and drivers on any form of transportation.
  - Allowances will be made for medically-documented cases that require accommodations under Section 504 of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
  - Mask breaks will be provided as needed. Masks may be removed when actively eating or drinking.
  - Extra student and adult size masks will be available in all buildings.
  - Staff may remove masks when working alone in their rooms.
  - Masks are not required in outdoor settings.
- **Distancing:** The goal is to maintain at least 3' of distancing whenever possible, as long as it does not impede the district from offering full-time, in-person instruction for all students.
- **Personal Hygiene:** Continue to focus on and encourage frequent hand washing, hand sanitizing, minimal sharing of supplies, and proper sneeze and cough etiquette.
- **Cleaning and Disinfecting:** High touch surfaces will be cleaned throughout the school day. If a building has someone who tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 24 hours, the space will be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.
- **Ventilation:** Ionization equipment has been installed in facilities to remove particles and contaminants from indoor air. Increasing outside air circulation will continue to be done by keeping doors and windows open, when possible. Tents will be rented for each school during the fall and spring.
- **Vaccinations:** The district will continue to promote vaccines and will make every effort to offer additional clinics for approved age groups.
- **Pooled Testing:** Pooled testing is optional for students and staff. The district anticipates starting pooled testing in mid-September. Students and staff who participate in pooled testing will not need to quarantine if they are a close contact of a positive case and can also be more flexible with social distancing. Being able to stay physically present in school and in extracurricular activities is something we want for all students and staff this year. Both vaccinated and unvaccinated students and staff are encouraged to sign up for this program.



- **Transportation:** Masks will be required for students and bus drivers, students can sit together on the bus and bus runs will be back to their normal runs.
- **Athletics:** We will be following the Maine Department of Education and Maine Principals' Association guidelines with face masks being required on buses but not outdoors.
- **Distance learning:** There will be a limited number of distance learning options for students with medical needs.
- **Visitors:** The district will limit any visitors or large group gatherings in our schools.
- **Field trips:** Field trips will be approved if they are essential to the curriculum and can follow the health/safety protocols.
- **Eating:** Students will need to sit three feet apart and facing in the same direction.

Superintendent Manuel stated that the plan will be revisited on a regular basis and that the administrators feel this plan is the best chance to start school safely and keep our kids and staff in school 100% of the time.

Vice Chairperson Ensel felt that students should not be required to wear masks when they are physically exerting themselves in gym inside or outside. Assistant Superintendent Joseph reported that students will not be required to wear masks outdoors and physical education will be outside as much as possible. The district purchased some new equipment that was recommended by some of our physical education teachers which will help provide more outdoor activities for our students. Ms. Joseph stated that we have put a lot of thought into how much time the students can spend outside and what alternative activities we can offer our students outdoors while continuing to progress in all the standards for that course.

Vice Chairperson Ensel stated that we don't want to have people quarantine and, if we start the year out with staff and students wearing masks, the Board can look at how the district is doing each month and get updated data to review. Mr. Ensel would like to get some parameters from the state as to at what percent of positivity rate in our schools would we be able to lift the mandate. The district will need to monitor and reevaluate where we are on a regular basis.

Superintendent Manuel stated that there are other states that are looking at a certain threshold of vaccination rate in order to make the mask optional. This was part of the conversation this morning with the Department of Education and we have asked Dr. Hanna for her input as to what metrics the Board and district should look at in order to have mask wearing an optional choice.

Superintendent Manuel reported that the district had a student athlete test positive. The nursing staff still consults with the CDC, looks at close contacts and whether or not they are vaccinated. In this instance, there were 15 to 20 students that needed to quarantine while those that were vaccinated did not need to quarantine.

Assistant Superintendent Joseph stated that if these students opted into pooled testing then the only person that would need to quarantine would be the one that tested positive which is one of the reasons why the Department of Education recommends this program.

Board member Ritch-Smith stated that she would like a report by our building principals as to how they carry out masks breaks with their staff including how it is done, when it is done, and how they are going to be overseeing that process to make sure that it is implemented. Ms. Ritch-Smith asked that the report be included in the administrator's Board report in September and October.



Board member Ryan felt that we have to find somewhere in the middle between abundance of caution and no caution at all. Mask equity was a question from some of our constituents as far as mask availability and students being able to change their mask during the day.

Dr. Amina Hanna responded to a question about mask exemptions by stating that parents would communicate with their primary care physician in order to determine whether it is something that is appropriate for a particular student.

Assistant Superintendent Joseph reported that currently there are no public vaccine clinics scheduled in schools but we will look at scheduling one once a vaccine is available for the younger students. Dr. Hanna stated that vaccinations are readily available for the older students at local pharmacies and Mid Coast Hospital. Ms. Joseph will look into having bus transportation for students that would like to get vaccinated.

Vice Chairperson Ensel stated that if we go in a direction where we err on the side of caution with masks we still want all the big events to take place in the district, keep everyone safe and have as normal a year as possible. The reports from the Department of Education and CDC are needed on a regular basis in order for the Board to determine what is safe to make sure these activities can take place.

Board member Brown stated that the Board is in a very difficult position and that she has spent a great deal of time thinking about the numbers and transmission rates and trying to weigh the risks and benefits of mandating masks in our schools. At this time, Ms. Brown is not comfortable with mandating masks in our schools. Sagadahoc County has had 41 individuals test positive for COVID-19 during this month which is 0.12% of the total population in our county. Ms. Brown felt that these numbers are very low and yet we are asking our kids to come to school wearing masks. Ms. Brown asked that if we trusted the guidance that the CDC and DOE provided last year then why wouldn't we trust their guidance now when they are not mandating masking at this time. The short and long term consequences to wearing a mask for an extended period of time have not been determined. Many parents have expressed their concern about the impact developmentally, educationally, socially, and emotionally this has on their children. Ms. Brown stated that until the numbers show a need for a public health mandate by the CDC or the DOE, it should remain up to parents and individuals to make an informed decision for themselves and that the district should continue to strongly encourage masks wearing but not make it a mandate. Ms. Brown realizes that this could change at any time and remains a fluid situation. The Board is prepared to meet as often as necessary to review the changing information and update protocols as needed. Ms. Brown stated that she will stand with her fellow Board members in whatever decision is made and has the utmost confidence in our administrators who have handled this situation with grace and professionalism.

Board member Ritch-Smith stated that she honors a parent's ability to understand their child and hopes that the parents in the community will equally honor that the Board is not trying to decide what you do in your homes but we are here to decide how to run a school district safely for all of the children. All we can do is gather all the data we can and make the best possible choices for all of the students in all of our communities. Keeping our children together in-person in school continues to remain the best possible path moving forward.

Chairperson August summed up his thoughts by saying that this is a public health issue and should not be a school board issue. Mr. August's single focus is to keep kids in class and schools open and felt that, in the short term, the best way to do that is to accept the administration's recommendation. Reports from other school districts around the country show that some areas are seeing wide spread outbreaks and closing schools. The public has made some great recommendations and people have taken this very seriously. This will continue to be an ongoing conversation as we move through the school year.



Board member Perkins thanked his colleagues on the Board and spoke in support of the guidelines as presented by the administration.

**MOTION:** Dorr

**SECOND:** Ritch-Smith

**VOTE:** Board (6-0)(1 abstained)

**TO:** Amend the motion to include "with the intent that this is an item of discussion at each Board meeting".

**MOTION:** Perkins

**SECOND:** Ritch-Smith

**VOTE:** Board (6-1)

**TO:** Implement RSU 1 health and safety guidelines for the school year 2021-2022 as presented to the Board by the administration as amended.

Board member Ryan asked that the following information is provided to the Board at each meeting:

- Vaccination rates at each school;
- Pooled testing participation rate; and
- Number of quarantines per school and the number of students involved.

#### **EXTEND THE MEETING PAST THE TWO-HOUR LIMIT**

**MOTION:** Brown

**SECOND:** Ritch-Smith

**VOTE:** Board (7-0)

**TO:** Extend the meeting past the two-hour limit.

#### **ESSER III (ARP) FUNDING PRESENTATION AND INPUT**

Assistant Superintendent Joseph reported that the American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds are coming out of the ARP Act of 2021. The state provided each district with the amount that they would be receiving from this fund and RSU 1 is allocated to receive \$4.1 million which needs to be expended by the end of 2024. Ms. Joseph reviewed the allowable purchases that we can buy using these funds.

The administrative team met and came up with 30 possible ideas which Ms. Joseph shared with the Board. Dr. Manuel and Ms. Joseph will be collecting any further ideas from the Board and Ms. Joseph encouraged members of the community to email them with any additional suggestions on how this money should be spent. Ms. Joseph reviewed the six areas recommended by the administration:

1. Summer programming;
2. Extended school day at Morse High School expanded to other schools;
3. Staffing to reduce class sizes, expand PreK program, and support our students;
4. Building improvement;
5. PPE supplies; and
6. Learning loss – extra interventions.

Board member Ritch-Smith suggested adding opportunities for before and after care, developing additional wrap around services to mirror the Head Start model, and additional transportation services to help our families access services in the area.

Board member Ryan requested that, as the list evolves and decisions are made, that the long term fiscal impact once the grant funding expires is considered.

## **ADDITIONAL STATE SUBSIDY DISCUSSION**

Board member Perkins stated that this should go to the Finance Committee first and then come to the Board with a recommendation.

Superintendent Manuel stated that the Board will need to make a recommendation and decision during the next Board meeting. The additional subsidy is the result of the state lowering the state set mil rate from 7.9 to 7.26. The options include giving part or all of it back to the communities, adding it to the fund balance, or the capital reserve fund which currently has \$200,000. The capital reserve fund is used for big unexpected projects or other major health/safety projects.

Board member Ritch-Smith stated that she would support returning a portion of the subsidy back to the towns if that portion would make any significant impact to the town's mil rate. Ms. Ritch-Smith would also like the heating issue at Woolwich Central School to be addressed as soon as possible and would like a recommendation before the next Board meeting.

Chairperson August stated that it would appropriate to bring this to the Finance Committee for a recommendation. Mr. August would also like a report from Facilities Director David Richards and how we are prioritizing projects in the district.

## **NEXT MEETING DATE AND LOCATION**

- Regular Board meeting will be held on Monday, September 27, 2021 at Morse High School - 6:00 pm

## **ADJOURN**

**MOTION:** Perkins

**SECOND:** Ryan

**VOTE:** Board (7-0)

**TO:** Adjourn at 8:22 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Patrick M. Manuel, Ed.D.  
Secretary



SCHOOL BOARD MEETING  
AUGUST 23, 2021  
PUBLIC COMMENTS

Hello, my name is Allie Benoit.

I am an upcoming Freshman at Morse High School in Bath, Maine, and would like to share my opinion on the mask debate and the special board meeting that took place today on August 16, 2021.

My mother, Beth Benoit, attended the board meeting and informed me of what had taken place. When she came home and described to me that not only was the vote / popular opinion split 60/40 but that masks not being mandatory was the majority of the vote, I was taken aback. The idea that the majority of adults attending the meeting and concerned citizens who had added public comments online believed that masks should not be mandatory in school shocked me immensely.

Since the epidemic of COVID-19 started, 37,732,963 people in the United States have been infected. Out of those 37,732,963 people, 638,772 of them have died. More than 638 thousand people, in the US alone, have lost their lives to this deadly disease. That number is shockingly horrifying and there's no question that COVID-19 is to be taken as seriously as possible. With this said, the only effective methods to protect yourself from getting sick are to get the vaccine and wear masks in public.

When going and taking a walk downtown near my house and walking into shops on the waterfront, I personally observe no more than 50% of the people in these stores wearing masks. I always seem to realize this and point out to anyone I'm with or to my parents how irresponsible I believe it is. In my opinion, I believe not wearing a mask is only reckless and irresponsible by putting yourself in danger, but also selfishly partaking in infecting and killing the ones around you. Even with the most recent CDC recommendations for people to wear masks indoors, it seems like no one is taking these recommendations made by health professionals seriously.

As for people with medical and mental disorders that make wearing masks more dangerous and self-detrimental to their health than the actual virus itself, I believe they should be excused from this general rule of thumb. People with lung problems such as asthma, or any other condition that makes breathing abnormally difficult, as well as people with panic disorders or other mental disabilities that are highly affected by wearing masks shouldn't be required to wear masks in school, as it will cause more harm than good.

By not making masks mandatory in the upcoming school year, we're basically stating that we don't care about the welfare of our students; that we don't care about the safety and health of our citizens; and that we'd rather be stubborn and selfish while supporting our own personal interests and ignoring everyone else's around us. Does this sound like our amazing Bath school board? Does this sound like what citizens and students alike in this town believe? I don't think so. I think students want to go to school without the fear of getting sick themselves and infecting their family members and peers around them. I think parents want to support the best interest of their children and ensure their safety and health. We need to stop the spread now while we still can so no one else has to get infected, and no more people have to die. We either deal with this now and address it head-on while we're still able to or have to deal with it for the next coming years where it will only get progressively worse. The only way to help this community and its students is to make masks mandatory this school year.

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Hello -

I would like to add my voice to those in favor of masks **being optional** this school year. I am a former special education teacher with a masters degree in developmental psychology from Columbia University and can assure you that although children generally seem fine with masks and go along with the policy without much complaint, they are in fact missing out incredibly important facial social-cues that are vital to social-emotional and proper speech (and later reading) development. I am sure you are well aware of the data related to the low impact of covid on children and exaggerated claims of asymptomatic transmission among them so I will not include that here.

Thank you, Emily Talmage

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Dear School Board Members, Dr. Manuel and Assistant Superintendent Joseph,  
I write as an educator in RSU1, a second grade teacher at WCS for 18 years. First I offer thanks for your leadership, time and vision; I have felt so supported as a teacher in the last year and a half and was grateful to be teaching in person throughout the 2020-21 school year. It went so well and rarely did any student in my class complain about, or have difficulty with, mask wearing. The kids and I were just thrilled to be together in our classroom.

I am very supportive of a mask policy for all staff and students to start the year. Based on the information presented by Dr. Hanna, the CDC and the AAP guidelines, I feel it is the only safe choice to protect our community. Is teaching in a mask fun? Not especially. But can I make my class a loving, safe, fun and warm place while we are all wearing masks? Absolutely!

Due to Katie and Patrick's vision, diligence, organization, preparation and communication, I feel our district has set teachers up to be highly successful and help our students have positive and thorough learning experiences.

Thank you for your time and energy in such a complicated time for our school communities.  
Sincerely,  
Beth Pols

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Good morning,

We were sorry to have missed the Monday, August 17th meeting and are sending this email so you can include our comments in your decision making process.

First, we'd like to offer our appreciation for what RSU1 was able to accomplish and make possible last year. The fact that we were able to get our kids back into school, be together, and have opportunities to interact socially, under difficult circumstances, was a major accomplishment. We are grateful for all those efforts, and we want to continue to support RSU1's ability to continue to do that good work.

The most important thing is that all kids can be in school. With just over 50% of the 12-15 year olds being vaccinated, wearing masks is the best way to help kids stay in school and protect those who are not vaccinated or who are immunocompromised. The school's doctor, and other pediatricians are also supportive of this approach.

If it is helpful to note this as well, we are supportive of the concept of pooled testing as a way to quickly identify cases in the community.

We hope the School Board will base their decision on the CDC's recommendation, science, and our trusted local pediatricians.

Thanks for considering our comments.

Tim Blair and Kate Dempsey

903 High Street  
Bath, ME 04530

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Dear School Board Members,

I was unable to attend the school board meeting, but I would like to strongly encourage the Board to mandate masks for all students, staff, and teachers in schools. I have a daughter at Morse High School and live in Bath. Like many people have pointed out, wearing a mask is a public health issue. We protect our children's health and safety in many ways, from reducing allergens to mandating certain kinds of clothing in the winter. RSU1 did an amazing job last year of creating a stimulating learning environment and protecting the students of our community in very difficult and uncertain circumstances. We are still in the midst of a global pandemic, and masking is one of the easiest ways to protect our children and each other. Please stand up for those who cannot get vaccinated. As a teacher myself, I know that teaching and learning when wearing a mask is not ideal. At the same time with larger numbers of students in classrooms, with many teachers, students and staff who are unvaccinated, and with the increasing prevalence of the Delta variant, masking would reduce the risk to our community.

Thank you,  
Krista Van Vleet  
(Bath)

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Dear RSU1 school board members,

First of all, thank you for your service. Your job is not an easy one but, based on what I saw at Monday evening's school board meeting, you're nailing it.

I stayed the entire meeting and did not speak but listened carefully to all the comments. Everyone seemed to agree on 2 points: we should (1) protect our kids from getting sick and (2) keep them in school/avoid shutdowns.

One way to look at this problem is that you basically have 6 solutions, each of which can be implemented in varying degrees to achieve the goal of keeping kids healthy and in school:

vaccination  
masking  
distancing  
testing

hygiene (in-school)  
health pre-checks (at home)

I have 3 suggestions:

1. If 80% of a school's students and staff are vaccinated (or whatever percentage is deemed protective), masking and distancing should be optional. If fewer are vaccinated, then some combination of distancing, masking, and/or testing should be implemented.

2. Even if 100% are vaccinated, we are going to have breakthrough covid, so good hygiene and health pre-checks should be required in any case. The goal of pre-checks should be to prevent symptomatic people from entering school buildings. Maybe it's working ok but from my perspective the self-check requirement was pretty loosey goosey at BMS last year; our family would often forget to do it and I suspect we weren't the only ones. Perhaps there is a way to remind (require?) students and staff to take temps every morning and check for other symptoms. Before we were all vaccinated, my employer required us to check in with an app every morning called Campus Clear before we could come to work.

3. Testing is expensive but a well designed testing program would nip outbreaks in the bud and could prevent school closure. Might there be federal money for additional PCR and/or antigen testing to supplement the planned pooled testing? My employer (Bowdoin College) PCR-tested its staff twice per week. Now that we're all vaccinated, that will shift to once per month. My employer is using antigen testing (less sensitive but quicker and cheaper) in some cases, too. We've had no outbreaks. Bowdoin's COVID coordinator is Mike Ranen, maybe he'd be willing to share with RSU1 some lessons learned [207-725-3037](tel:207-725-3037) [mranen@bowdoin.edu](mailto:mranen@bowdoin.edu)

Thank you again for all your hard work.

Lisa Ledwidge  
[207-844-1956](tel:207-844-1956)  
Mom to Morse HS 9th grader  
Bath

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Dear RSU1 School Board Members,

First, I want to thank you for all that you have been doing over the last year+ to ensure that area students have access to education and other services amidst the pandemic. I am certain this has been incredibly stressful time for all of you -- making impossibly difficult decisions amidst your own stress and constantly changing information. I am immensely proud - and grateful - for how much our area students have been able to be in-person for learning, while being kept safe.

I am a mom of two students -- a 7th grader at BMS and a senior at Morse. Both of my daughters eagerly stepped up to be vaccinated as soon as it was an option last Spring, in hopes that it would lead to a path of greater normalcy over the summer and into the new school year. They are both incredibly disappointed to see this possibility slipping away.

I am deeply concerned that the presence of the contagious delta variant of COVID-19 threatens the safety of our school community -- and the families they go home to.

I am as eager as anyone to shed the masks, but **I believe that a mask mandate is needed as we open the doors in the fall to ensure the continuity of education and the safety of our school community.** Expecting students, teachers, staff to voluntarily wear them is simply unrealistic.

Given the ever-shifting nature of this pandemic, I would love to see the Board vote for a mask mandate, with a scheduled review of the policy every 30 days to re-evaluate the need.

Let's get all of our students back to full-time, in-person learning safely.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best regards,  
Michelle Lambert  
Bath

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Good Evening,

I came to the board meeting Monday night, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about why many of us believe children should have the option to wear masks. I would like to share this article with you and the others in hopes that you'll understand the "why" behind the reason we feel the way we do. Also the Auburn School Committee voted last night for masking to be up to the parents, a step in the right direction.

I also think it's important to point out that even though you didn't receive as many emails from people against mask mandates, that doesn't mean that many of us aren't passionate about the subject. Most people I spoke with were afraid to speak their mind because of how they may be treated in the community. One mother I spoke with wanted to come and speak but her daughter, who will be a senior this year, begged her not to because she "didn't want to have a target on her back all year". Another friend of mine said they wouldn't go because they are on another school board and didn't want to ruffle feathers. Another parent I spoke with runs a local business and was afraid of the repercussions if her opinion was made public. There are so many of us that feel this should be a parental decision but feel silenced for fears of being judged and worse. Please read this and understand the dire need for parental choice in this matter. Thank you again.

Amber Herzog LE

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Hello RSU1 School Board,

First, let me say that I feel for you, having to help us navigate these complicated waters.

I wanted to write to voice my pro-mask opinion for schools -- especially for those grades with kids who are too young to receive the vaccine yet. Having experienced both distance learning and masked in-person learning with my daughter Adelaide Bova Jones (DNS, going into 2nd grade), I have to say there is no question that in-person is far and away a better learning environment for her. Based on what the scientists tell us about COVID transmission, I see masks as the best way to assure we are able to stay with in-person learning.

I also believe that there is something comforting for our kids to be going through this collectively, as a shared experience. And though individually some might dislike masking more than others, it becomes less of a disruption if everyone simply has to do it.

We have only had wonderful teachers at DNS -- including specials teachers -- and I'm so happy Addie is a student there. I would love her to benefit from being in school for this upcoming year.

Thank you,

Wren Bova  
[wren.bova@gmail.com](mailto:wren.bova@gmail.com)

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Dear Members of RSU-1 School Board,

I am gravely concerned that the upcoming school year will be heavily affected by the on-going Covid pandemic. I urge you to follow CDC guidelines as closely as possible. I believe that a minimum you should adopt a mask mandate requiring that all individuals on school grounds be masked at all times (with an obvious exception when actively eating or drinking). I recommend an aggressive testing

regimen with mandatory quarantines for positive tests. I support a vaccine mandate but recognize this may not be possible.

I urge you to be prepared for hybrid and or fully-remote learning should situations necessitate this.

Thank you for all you do for our communities.

Respectfully,

Bruce W. Hauptli, Bath

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Dear School Board,

I am grateful to learn that West Bath School voted for indoor masking, and I hope that RSU1 will vote to begin the school year in this way as well. Let's maximize the safety of our community and the stability of the school year, so our student body can continue to attend full-time and hopefully without disruption.

Thank you,  
Camille Kauffunger

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Good Morning,

It is to my understanding that the district has a meeting tonight and any decision on a mask mandate indoors will be made. I am unable to attend this meeting in person, and therefore am submitting my comments. My name is Alysia and my family and I reside in Woolwich, ME. My son will be attending WCS for the upcoming school year.

We are discussing children here. Studies have shown that children are at the lowest risk and I feel as though we are punishing them and taking away a part of their childhood. Having been in a different school district where my son was completely remote last year until the beginning of February and then hybrid from Feb-June, I witnessed many parents saying that their child(ren) would rather be remote simply because they didn't want to wear a mask in school. Having been the primary caregiver during school hours last year, I can say with complete certainty that remote is no way to learn unless a family has made the *choice* to homeschool.

As a parent of an almost 7-year old, I think it is important that I have rights pertaining to that child, especially his health and mental / physical well-being. What other parents do for their children is, quite frankly, none of my concern, nor do I judge them if their opinion is different than my own. It should 100% - as a family - be our choice as to whether or not our children have to "mask up." I am sure all of the parents will be given the information needed (social distancing practices, cleaning procedures, etc) in order to make what they feel is the best decision for their child(ren) and the health of their family.

I understand that research on this virus is all over the place and the information we are given as a whole has never been truly consistent. Because of that, and the opinion I provided above, **I do very strongly believe that masks indoors should be *optional***, and I hope you all come to the conclusion that will allow families to make that decision on an individual basis.

I appreciate your time and the ability to allow us to submit these virtually.

Alysia Coats

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My name is Amy Lang. I live in Georgetown and have two tuition students in this district. I guess I should say, had. My husband and I opted to homeschool last school year. At the time we felt we were given no other option. **We are 100% against masking our children** for long periods of time. We feel it does far more harm than it does good. In addition to that, the internet available to us at home is extremely slow, it is impossible to have two laptops running in our house at the same time so your Zoom school was not gonna work for us either.

My son is high functioning autistic, he struggles with anxiety. His anxiety is triggered by change and by fear. He was finally getting comfortable with his transition from Georgetown Central School to Woolwich Central School when the pandemic caused all of the school closures. The rest of that school year I consider a wash. He homeschooled for his eighth grade year and we were so hoping to send him back to public school to begin his high school career and to get him the extra help that he needs. He is extremely anxious and scared to death right now about going to high school as am I to send him. My daughter has always been an excellent student, A's and B's, school almost came too easy for her. After the school closure she lost all interest in her education. She was depressed and didn't even try. Home schooling her sophomore year was not ideal, we tried our best but we were jumping into something we knew nothing about. It was very difficult to get her to engage in the subjects that didn't interest her. She is a healthy young lady but has had two panic attacks this last year, both while out shopping with a mask on. After witnessing this, we are definitely NOT comfortable with the thought of her being masked up for 7+ hours a day, five days a week, but she desperately wants to be reunited with her peers.

I understand that there are parents who are worried about their child contracting Covid. But there are many of us who are far more worried about our children's mental health these days and we are being brushed aside to make way for all of these crazy Covid protocols that are so harmful to our kids. We are going to end up with an entire generation that is scared of a handshake! How many children are we going to keep depressed and anxiety ridden? How many children are we going to loose to suicide? My guess is far more than will ever suffer from Covid symptoms. The damage we are causing to our children's mental health is inhumane and long lasting. It does not deserve to take a backseat to Covid. Have you done a risk assessment here?

I expect that this school board will vote tomorrow to bring back the mask mandate to our schools as I've learned from experience that it is far easier to follow the masses than it is to take a stand. I am angry that this will once again force me as a parent to choose between my child's mental health and their education. It's simply not right.

Thank you for your time and for allowing me, as a parent, to voice my opinion on this matter. Please hear me out!

Amy Lang  
P.O. Box 195  
Georgetown, ME 04548

[Langgang04548@gmail.com](mailto:Langgang04548@gmail.com)

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Good Morning. My name is Amy Martin and I live in Arrowsic. I am a registered nurse and have worked at MidCoast Hospital for over 25 years. I am writing to give my opinion regarding masking. I am in favor of only masking indoors for the start of the school year. The Delta variant is here and surging right now. As you know it is highly contagious. I would like to see the indoor masking reevaluated at a later date as I would like my son to have a more normal year. It is a balance with the mental health of our children. I would like to also take the time to encourage the school board to consider a mandate for vaccinating the high school students. We live in a society where we vaccinate against diseases that harm us and our

community. I know people are concerned with their rights. My child has a right to attend public school without fear of contracting a potentially deadly virus. In short, I am in favor of masking indoors for the beginning of school. Hopefully vaccination rates will increase and as this does, I would like to consider removing masks in school at a later date. Remaining in school 5 days a week for in person learning is extremely important for our children. Thank you for your time. Good luck as I realize this is very difficult. Sincerely Amy Martin

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I appreciate that the RSU1 school board is reconsidering this issue, due to the resurgence of the coronavirus pandemic. A few years ago there was a heated debate in this State about mandatory vaccination for childhood contagious diseases. A substantial majority of Mainers, especially in Bath, supported common sense, science-based public health that promoted public safety. I believe now that a substantial majority of Mainers, in the midst of a resurgent pandemic, again support common sense public health measures. We are dealing with a highly contagious virus that has been allowed to survive and mutate to a more dangerous form due to a minority of the population embracing politics over public health. The virus is spread through the air. Masking mitigates spread. Most people would cover their mouth rather than cough in somebody's face, even though it would infringe on their personal liberty. Please don't allow a strident minority with axes to grind endanger the rest of us. Thank you for your consideration,

Mark W. Mahnke, M.D.  
Bath

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Parents might want to keep a prerogative to have a say in what happens to their children at school. However, some issues are more important than parent control- particularly the common welfare, the health and safety of the whole community. Since children under 12 years of age cannot receive the Covid vaccine, without masks, they have no protection against the virus. Masks exert two way protection; they keep other's viruses from affecting the child and block an individual's viruses from spreading to others in the community. There are no side effects except for some children, very mild discomfort. Please vote to mandate masks at school.

Jessica Mahnke MD, Bath

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From Judy Wolfe in Bath

I am writing regarding the upcoming school board meeting where a vote will be taken on a mask mandate in RSU 1. It is absolutely essential that there be a mask mandate in our schools. This is a public health imperative. If our children cannot be protected at school, we as a community cannot be safe. We owe it to our children and to the community to use every tool available to stop this pandemic. Please vote for a mask mandate in our schools.

Thank you

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Good morning,

I am Jeremy Cooper, a father of a 2nd grade student at Woolwich. I'd like to support the choice to wear or not wear a mask and oppose the mask mandate.



Given the studies, our rights, the health concerns of wearing a mask for hours on end, low covid numbers in the area, and how little children are impacted, I feel a mask mandate is an overreach and unnecessary.

Please support our rights in this matter for freedom of choice. I support those who desire to wear one and those who choose to not wear one.

Thank you,  
Jeremy Cooper

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To Whom It May Concern,

As the parent of a student at Morse High, I fully support a mask mandate. My husband has a heart condition and, although we are all vaccinated, he would still be at risk if he were to catch Covid. I am also concerned about the potential long-term effects of the virus. Last year, we almost decided to opt for the distance learning option, but our son begged us to be allowed to attend school 2 days per week and we decided that the risks of not doing so outweighed the risks of going. The mask mandate was a big influence as we made our decision. I have difficulty understanding why this is even an issue. In order to function as a society, individuals sometimes need to give up certain freedoms in favor of collective welfare. We have to ask ourselves: Which freedom is more important, the freedom to attend school without wearing a mask, or the freedom to attend school without risking the health and life of one's self and one's family? It doesn't seem like a difficult choice to me.

Sincerely, Laurie Weber-Taft

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Masking! Masking plus vaccination plus testing!  
Please protect our children.  
Robert Lobis, MD  
Bath

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Hello, I have been a contact tracer in Maine for nearly a year. I have spoken with hundreds of parents and school employees. I understand the hardship a family can face when their child or they themselves have become a close contact, and unable to go to work if they have to care for a child at home for 10 days or they are an employee of the school.

With the new operating guidelines in place, if universal masking for students and staff are correctly implemented, a student or staff member would not have to quarantine fully at home and miss school for the 10 days. In other words, they would be able to come to school, however, they would not be able to participate in extracurricular activity and should only quarantine in the community setting.

These new guidelines will enable parents and school staff to continue to work at their jobs, as parents would not need to stay home with their young child.

It would also enable students of all ages to come to school and be in school instead of staying home for the entire 10 days.

Stephanie Prue

Yes, I believe in a mask mandate for children. Children are dying of Covid 19 because they are infecting each other. I am for anything that saves children's lives, and the masks have been proven to be effective at protecting them from the virus. In addition, it will keep them from carrying the virus home, and infecting their parents, siblings, grandparents, etc., as well as neighbors and friends, all of whom could infect each other. The chain, unfortunately, is endless. Please, please vote to save our children, and each other!

Linda Skernick  
Bath resident

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Dear School Board,  
My name is Caroline Luchies, and I'm going to be a 6th grader at WCS this year. I listened to the Board Meeting last week, and some people were talking about how they don't want kids wearing masks because of how uncomfortable they are. I personally don't mind the masks. Sometimes, I forget I'm wearing it and have to be reminded to take it off when I get home. Masks also keep us safe. I didn't get a cold all year because of my mask, which I normally do. While there's COVID, people should be required to wear masks in school. If masks aren't required this year, I would feel uncomfortable and worried about getting COVID.  
Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,  
Caroline from Woolwich