

The Fordyce School Board met in special session on Friday August 27, 2021 at noon in the conference room at the central office. The meeting was called to order by Jessica Young at 12:00 p.m.

Word of prayer was given by Silas Warner.

Those answering roll call were Jessica Young, Silas Warner, Deborah Mathews, Susan Ridings and Dr. Hubbell.

New Business

Dr. Hubbell presented the board with a resolution to mandate wearing a mask for Kindergarten – 12th grade. She is trying to not quarantine faculty, staff, and students. Dr. Hubbell stated that SubTeach would not be able to supply us with enough substitutes if we have very many faculty members absent.

Chase McCollum said the current number of students out due to optional masks has caused about 25% of the high school students to be sent home to quarantine and this number will continue to rise throughout the day. Virtual is not effective for students or teachers. The students aren't learning and the teachers are overworked. He said the mask mandate is a no brainer with the rules and latest guidance to mandate masks for everybody in the district to stay face to face. He stated that everyone needs to leave their feelings and beliefs aside. He stated that he and Mrs. Lawson have buildings to run and be instructional leaders. They can't be effective if the students aren't in front of them. If everyone wears a mask they won't have to quarantine regardless of vaccination, as long as both parties are wearing a mask properly and there are no symptoms being shown any of the parties. They will be able to stay in school for face to face instruction.

Rhonda Lawson said she has 4 adults out as of today. There are 1 with the virus and 2 are quarantined. She had 1 staff member that was going home showing symptoms. There are 22 elementary students currently quarantined. The children under 12 can't take the vaccination. Administration is helping with contact tracing. Mrs. Lawson said she didn't sleep well when she found out her first staff member was positive. She worries about the children because they can't be vaccinated.

Deborah Mathews asked how will the students that are quarantined learn. Mrs. Lawson stated that they will have chromebooks except Kindergarten students but they will receive paper packets. Mr. McCollum stated that high school students were issued chromebooks during registration and they will use the google classroom. But there are some students that don't have internet and that will cause an issue. Mr. McCollum stated that there will be paperwork for the students that can't get internet. Mrs. Lawson stated it isn't effective because some of the children don't have a supportive adult at home. Dr. Hubbell stated that it would break her heart for one of the children at elementary to be on a ventilator.

Dr. Hubbell stated that Sunni Mathews has worked extra hard trying to get the contact tracing done accurately.

Sunni Mathews said between 75 and 80 students are currently out at Fordyce High School. The majority of those students wouldn't have had to quarantine if they had been wearing masks. She stated that the 3-foot rule had been thrown out as long as everyone has their mask on properly. There are a few that were fully vaccinated that didn't have to quarantine. One of the positive students was fully vaccinated. Sunni stated that she has to go through the video from each classroom involved to check which students were around the positive student.

Dr. Hubbell stated there were 4 football players quarantined for tonight's game. The pep rally has been cancelled for this afternoon because there are several cheerleaders quarantined and she doesn't think it is a good idea to have everyone in the arena.

Dr. Hubbell introduced Cory McMann from the Nutt Walley Clinic. Mr. McMann is a nurse practitioner. He stated that currently the CDC is not requiring masks to be worn outside. Mr. McMann said the virus has affected him as a parent because his daughter has medical problems and he has lost patients. He stated that masks work and vaccines work. He said this is not political, this is scientific. He had a patient test negative on Monday that was fully vaccinated, now the patient has Covid pneumonia. Mr. McMann said he wears a mask even though he is fully vaccinated. He doesn't want to see people in ICU. He recommends that everyone wear a mask to protect the kids. He said this is science.

Dr. Walley and Christal Martindale both text Dr. Hubbell to let her know they think the district needs a mask mandate.

Tammie Works is on the Child Health Advisory Committee and the committee is signing a letter supporting that K – 12 mask mandate will come down statewide. She stated that masks work and they are effective. Ms. Works stated that not only do students not have a parent at home but they are not fed properly either. Dr. Hubbell thanked Tammie for serving on that Child Health Advisory Committee. Deborah Mathews asked Ms. Works if meals are available to the students that are in quarantine. She said that meals are available but they have to be picked up from the cafeteria. The cafeteria is currently feeding anyone in the community 18 and under free of charge.

Sunni Mathews stated that last year with the mask mandate there weren't as many Covid positive cases in the district. There have already been more positive cases in one day than the total amount last year. She said the masks also cut down on strep, flu, and stomach virus cases last year. Mrs. Lawson stated that about 75% of the elementary students are wearing masks. Some of the students will even come ask for a mask if they forgot to wear one. Susan Ridings stated that students will model whatever is enforced. Even the older students will wear on when they see the adults wearing one. Tammie Works said she sees more and more students wearing masks.

Crystal Matlock said Covid is hitting the area hard right now. It is affecting not only the children but it is taking its toll on the older people as well.

Dr. Hubbell has had three people called her that are opposed to the mask mandate. She stated that the African American population is more embracing of the masks than the Caucasian population. Dr. Hubbell asked Mrs. Lawson was that a fair statement. Mrs. Lawson agreed with Dr. Hubbell.

Nicole McGhee, Fordyce Elementary Counselor, who is also a pastor in the community stated that the children are scared. They don't understand about the virus. She has observed the students wearing masks. She and her brother have been discussing the mask issue at the church. Currently, her members don't wear a mask if they have been fully vaccinated. But she is thinking she will address the issue after church on Sunday to talk to her congregation about everyone wearing masks again. She thinks that will be best for all of her church members. She is willing to be a spokesperson to the community for the mask mandate.

Dr. Hubbell stated that there are some excellent people in place in the district. She thanked each one for coming to the meeting to speak on behalf of the mask mandate.

Susan Ridings asked if there are concerns of hesitancy from the staff. Mr. McCollum stated that he will have some resistance with change but there will be no questions about the way he handles it with his personnel. There will be a course of action for those that want to violate the mandate. Mrs. Lawson said she thinks her staff will follow the protocol because they want to have the students at school. Ms. Ridings asked was there punishment for not wearing the mask. Dr. Hubbell said she doesn't want this to be crime and punishment for the students. Just tell them to put their mask on or offer them a mask if they forgot theirs. Dr. Hubbell contacted Kristen Garner, an attorney for the School Board Association, to find out what to do about a staff member that doesn't wear the mask. First time call them in and talk to them about wearing a mask. The next time it could become disciplinary and be write up. Mr. McCollum doesn't want it to get into a staff disciplinary issue. Ms. Ridings said she was glad they have discussed this and have a plan in place. Mrs. Lawson stated that everyone has got to see that this is the common good for everyone.

Dr. Hubbell asked everyone to please spread the word that the Department of Health is having a vaccination clinic at the football game tonight. ADE, AAA, and Arkansas Department of health are making a joint effort. They were trying for a high traffic game and they knew this game would have a high traffic.

Dr. Hubbell said she hardily recommends to the board to put in the mask mandate into place for the district.

Sunni said she has had several teachers call her and put their phone on speaker phone so she can talk to the students about the guidelines of wearing a mask. The students are wanting to wear the masks so they won't be quarantined.

Jessica Young said she teaches at a nursing program. She has rearranged her curriculum to the first thing she does when she walks in the room is infection control. She was assigned to a Covid 19 research group at UCA this past week and she also works as a RN at DCMC as a part-time almost full-time nurse. As a parent she has had a child in this district for almost 18 years and still has about 5 years left. She said she is all about protecting the weakest. One of her questions to the collective group is "how do we respond to the accusations of choice"? Some will feel like they are not being provided an option. Mrs. Lawson stated that she wants what is best for everyone and we have to protect the weakest and the youngest. Mr. McCollum agreed with Mrs. Lawson. He said everyone participates in legislation and freedom of choice. He said he would be glad to give any parent the information they need to go put their child in the program of their choice. He said he and Mrs. Lawson want all children to have a high-quality education. When students are quarantined they aren't getting the same education and opportunity that students face to face are getting. He said all students need to be in school. Mrs. Young said that what the board will be able to respond that there are options for students and they can contact the administrators for choices. Mr. McCollum said there is public school, private school, homeschool, and virtual school. Ms. Ridings asked if someone chose virtual school would the district bear the cost. Virtual Arkansas and virtual academy are two different things. The parent will pay the cost of the virtual academy. Mrs. Lawson explained that she had reserved seats in the digital learning with Arkansas River Coop. She has 15 slots that she is paying for with ESSER funds. Currently, she is only using 2 slots. The ones that use the digital learning with Arkansas River Coop are still our students and we get the funding for them. But if someone chooses to go with the virtual academy it will be at the parent's expense.

Jessica Young asked Cory McMann what about medical exemption from wearing a mask. If it is a respiratory issue then yes, they would get a medical exemption but not because they want it for political reasons. If you have a true medical reasoning they would be excused. He said if anyone comes to his office they would have to have a good reason to not wear a mask.

Dr. Hubbell recommends to the board that the board mandate wearing a mask for faculty, staff, and students grades K – 12 on buses and indoor activity. She said this is something that needs to be reviewed monthly and sometimes maybe sooner than a month. She understands that special board meetings are a pain but we are in an emergency situation. Deborah Mathews made a motion to accept the mask mandate as stated for students in grades K – 12, faculty, and staff on buses and indoor activities. Silas Warner seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously (4-0) with all board members that were present voting for the mandate.

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Dr. Hubbell asked the board to approve Virtual Arkansas as the digital learning plan for the high school. Deborah Mathews made a motion to approve Virtual Arkansas as the digital learning plan for Fordyce High School. Silas Warner seconded the motion. Motion carried 4-0.

The board and administration welcomed Susan Ridings to the board.

Adjournment

Deborah Mathews made the motion to adjourn at 12:39 p.m. Silas Warner seconded the motion. Motion carried 4-0.

Date

President

Secretary