

**BETHPAGE UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**Board of Education**

Michael J. Kelly, President  
Sandra Watson, Vice President  
Anna Israelton, Trustee  
John Lonardo, Trustee

James A. McGlynn, Trustee  
Marie Swierkowski, Trustee  
Christina Scelta, Trustee

September 26, 2021

Dear Bethpage Community,

During the past few weeks there has been much information around the community regarding the operating of our schools and some of the mandates required by the state, and we thought it important that you hear directly from the Board of Education (BOE). We are proud to live and serve in a community that values education and are grateful for your continued patience and support as we work together to get through this pandemic.

When schools were suddenly ordered to close back in March 2020, we were able to quickly pivot to an online instructional program and, while not optimal, our students were able to finish the school year. When school reopened in September 2020, Bethpage was one of the few school districts that opened for in-person instruction and remained opened for the entire school year without interruption.

Now, here we are in September 2021 and with little guidance from the NYS Department of Education, Bethpage once again opened for full-time in-person instruction. As part of the plan to reopen schools, the BOE made the decision to open with a mask optional school day. This decision allowed parents to make the decision based on their own comfort level.

However, just prior to school opening, the NYS Department of Health issued a statewide mandate that all students and staff wear masks during the school day. There has been some talk within the community that we do not have to follow a mandate. This is untrue and, in fact, every single school in New York is adhering to this mandate.

There has also been some talk that the district should ignore the mandate. If the BOE were to allow this, the district could face some serious consequences, such as:

- 1) Loss of state funding
- 2) Administrators losing their state license and face removal
- 3) A potential takeover of the district by NYS Department of Education

We think that you will agree that these are not consequences we would want to face as a district and possibly affect your child's education.

Shortly after the state issued the mask mandate, they issued a second mandate. This new mandate stated that all faculty and staff need to be tested weekly unless they show proof of vaccination. This new mandate affected staff only and not our student body.

This new mandate is very similar to a mandate that was issued, but never enforced, near the end of the last school year. At that time, we contracted with a testing company called ATC Healthcare Services. However, we never used their services. With the newest mandate, we again contracted with ATC and updated and approved the previous contract. This contract is for testing of staff only and not for vaccinations.

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In addition, to facilitate the testing of our staff, the district arranged to rent a trailer where the testing could take place. This rental is not part of the ATC contract and was rented using a District purchase order. Purchase orders do not need the approval of the BOE. This trailer was in fact delivered prior to the approval of the ATC contract, but the BOE was fully aware of the ATC contract and that we would be approving it at our next meeting.

A third issue that is being discussed within the community is a lawsuit that has been filed against the State and the mask mandate. Requests have been made for Bethpage to join this lawsuit. As of this writing, there have been only three districts out of 124 districts on Long Island that have joined this lawsuit. It should also be noted that when this lawsuit was filed, there was no request for other districts to join and we only heard, after the fact, that it was filed.

Since this lawsuit was filed without a request for us to join or our input, the BOE has made the decision that it made little sense to expend district funds in a belated attempt to join. The rationale for this decision is that once the lawsuit was filed, Bethpage as well as every school district in New York will automatically be affected by whatever decision the courts make.

As we move forward during this pandemic, please know that we continue to welcome you to our meetings. If you hear information that you are not sure of or have a specific question, please to not hesitate to contact us. In addition, during our regular meeting we allow a 30-minute public comment period where we welcome questions and comments from the community.

In closing, the BOE recognizes that over the past 18 months we have all been faced with challenges. We also feel that Bethpage is a special place to live and raise a child with outstanding schools, including our nationally recognized high school. In the coming months, it is our promise to you that we will continue the work to keep our schools open and provide the education your child deserves.

Sincerely yours,  
Michael J Kelly  
President

Sandra Watson  
Vice-President

Christina Scelta  
Anna Israelton  
John Lonardo  
James McGlynn  
Marie Swierkowski  
Trustees

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