

School Committee Policy Review Subcommittee
Thursday, August 12, 2021
5:00 PM - 6:10 PM
Remote via Zoom

Policy Review Subcommittee members present: David Pearlman (Chair), Valerie Frias, and Andreas Liu.

Policy Review Subcommittee members absent: Jennifer Monopoli.

Other School Committee members present: Susan Wolf Ditkoff.

School Staff present: Casey Ngo-Miller, Tricia Laham, and Robin Coyne.

Others present: Remote Task Force Advisory Panel 4 Co-Chair David Gacioch.

Mr. Pearlman called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM.

1) Approval of Minutes

On a motion of Dr. Liu and seconded by Mr. Pearlman, the Policy Review Subcommittee voted (by roll call), with a vote of 2 in favor, 0 opposed, and 1 abstention (Ms. Frias), to approve the minutes of the June 14, 2021 Policy Review Subcommittee meeting.

2) Discussion of Public Schools of Brookline (PSB) Policy on Face Coverings and Potential Recommendation for School Committee (Possible Vote)

Remote Task Force Advisory Panel 4 Co-Chair David Gacioch summarized Panel 4's most recent set of recommendations (not yet voted) for masking. *Panel 4, in line with the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and American Academy of Pediatrics, is recommending the following masking policy for the Public Schools of Brookline for the beginning of the school year (subject to ongoing reassessment and revision):*

Outdoors: not required, but encouraged when (especially unvaccinated) students/staff spend extended time in close quarters

Indoors: required for all, regardless of vaccination status (subject to individual accommodations as needed)

Coordinator of School Health Services Tricia Laham expressed support for universal masking of students and staff in school buildings. Ms. Laham and Ms. Ngo-Miller commented that, in general, last school year's Policy worked well.

Mr. Gacioch noted Panel 4's recommendation (not yet voted) for distancing.

In a fully-masked classroom, give educators freedom to organize seating as desired without regard to minimum distancing/direction of facing (group tables OK).

Subcommittee members asked about possible use of translucent masks for teachers whose students might benefit from seeing the teachers vocalize (younger students, in particular, and also students in language classes). Ms. Laham discussed the district's limited experience with translucent masks (sometimes fog up; could consider in some situations but may require more distancing).

The Subcommittee discussed reinstatement of a PSB Policy on Face Coverings. Last year the School Committee instituted a Policy on Face Coverings, but then voted on June

14, 2021 to rescind the Policy because its provisions no longer aligned with practice and guidance. The Subcommittee reviewed last year's PSB Policy on Face Coverings and recommended some edits (Attachment A). The Subcommittee discussed but did not add language that would provide more discretion to the Superintendent.

On a motion of Dr. Liu and seconded by Ms. Frias, the Policy Review Subcommittee voted unanimously (by roll call) to refer the proposed PSB Face Coverings Policy (Attachment B) to the School Committee.

The full School Committee will consider the proposed Policy on August 17, 2021.

Members suggested that the district send out a concise communication that notes the following: current public health guidance indicates that there should be universal masking for staff and students as we begin the school year; the district will regularly revisit this decision; universal masking is critical to relaxing distancing; and masking is just one of many health and safety measures including vaccination (most important), making sure symptomatic students and staff stay home, and identification of close contacts.

Mr. Gacioch encouraged all eligible people get vaccinated. Ms. Laham reported that approximately 70 percent of eligible students are vaccinated at this time. The PSB will be hosting a COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic at Lincoln School on August 18, 2021. All staff and families were notified. It was noted that Panel 4 will continue to consider a vaccination requirement, but there is no recommendation at this point.

3) Discussion of Health-Related Issues with Policy Implications

Mr. Gacioch summarized Panel 4's most recent set of recommendations for the start of the school year (not yet voted; current and subject to ongoing reassessment and revision as more guidance and data becomes available).

- **Vaccination** - *continue to promote as much as possible (continue to consider mandate as option but not recommended as of now)*
- **Masks**
 - *Outdoors: not required, but encouraged when (especially unvaccinated) students/staff spend extended time in close quarters*
 - *Indoors: required for all, regardless of vaccination status (subject to individual accommodations as needed)*
- **Ventilation** – *continue enhanced ventilation strategy in place at year-end*
- **Distancing** - *In a fully-masked classroom, give educators freedom to organize seating as desired without regard to minimum distancing/direction of facing (group tables OK)*
- **Lunch/snack/mask breaks (i.e., any unmasked times)**
 - *Outside as much as feasible*
 - *When indoors:*

- *Vaccine-eligible grades (7-12): **no minimum distance required** (full cafeteria use OK)*
- *Younger grades (PK-6): **3-foot minimum seat distancing** (we understand this limits cafeteria capacity)*
- *Limit unmasked indoor time as reasonably possible to allow for healthy eating*
- **Special situations**
 - *Vocal/wind instrumental music – for further discussion*
- **Testing**
 - *Not necessary to maintain safety; primary goal would remain reassurance*
 - *Highest priority = symptomatic individuals (with rapid antigen testing available)*
 - *More specifics to follow with updated DESE/DPH program guidance week of August 9th*
- **Symptom screening/stay home when sick – continue from year-end**
 - *Important that PSB have plan to facilitate learning/connection for students staying at home*
- **Contact tracing/quarantine – to be discussed further**

The full document presented during Advisory Panel 4’s August 6, 2021 meeting can be found at this link: <https://www.brookline.k12.ma.us/Page/2621>

The Subcommittee discussed whether the current PSB Attendance Policy should be amended so as not to penalize or discourage students from quarantining. Ms. Laham noted that the new testing initiative “Test and Stay” will allow asymptomatic close contacts to remain in school if they receive an individual rapid antigen test (e.g., BinaxNOW) each school day and test negative, as well as follow other guidelines. Members suggested that the district provide clear guidance for both short- and long-term quarantines. Staff will provide additional information regarding 1) how the district plans to educate students in quarantine and 2) whether DESE will allow students to be marked virtually present.

The Subcommittee discussed whether there is need to set a policy on transitions to after-school programs (such as Extended Day) that would limit visitors in the schools. Current practices vary across the schools, but in some cases, parents/guardians escort their children to the programs. Last year, the Interim Superintendent enacted a no visitor policy in the Schools. Members noted the importance of clearly communicating the rationale for policies/procedures. It was noted that the issue of visitors in schools has a number of implications (health and safety, building security, time on learning, school community), and that there should be discussion and community input before extending any restrictions beyond COVID. The Subcommittee will schedule a meeting to discuss the above issues. Members requested clarification of which practices should be at the discretion of the Superintendent and which should be codified in School Committee Policy.

The meeting adjourned at 6:10 PM.

PROPOSED PSB FACE COVERINGS POLICY SHOWS CHANGES TO PRIOR YEAR POLICY

The Public Schools of Brookline (PSB) are committed to providing a safe environment as schools reopen during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to public health experts, one of the best ways to stop the spread of coronavirus and to keep members of our school community safe is to wear face masks or face coverings (hereafter referred to as face coverings). Therefore, in consultation with guidance from the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH), the following requirements are in place until further notice.

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A face covering that completely covers the nose and mouth must be worn by all individuals upon arrival to and in school buildings, school transportation, and school-sponsored activities even when social distancing is observed. If a PSB activity is hosted at a non-PSB venue, the stricter rules will apply at the non-PSB venue. Face coverings must fit snugly against the sides of the face, secured with ties or ear loops. Gaiters, balaclavas, bandanas, and coverings with valves are prohibited.

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Individuals may be excused from this requirement for the following list of reasons, per CDC guidance:

The individual:

- has trouble breathing;
- is unconscious;
- is incapacitated;

In addition, face coverings will not be required for anyone who has a medical, behavioral or other challenge making it unsafe to wear a face covering. Face shields or physical barriers may provide an alternative to face coverings as an exemption in some instances, subject to the approval process outlined below.

A written note from a physician is required prior to approval of a requested exemption. In the event that a written note from a physician cannot initially be obtained due to hardship with timely access to a doctor, a written note from an NP or RN may be accepted on an interim basis, subject to the discretion of the school principal after consultation with the PSB Coordinator of School Health Services. Parents or guardians may not excuse their child from the face covering requirement by signing a waiver. Until an exemption waiver is approved, students must abide by the general terms of the PSB Face Coverings policy.

Additionally, face coverings will not be required when appropriate social distancing is enforced:

- while taking staggered face covering breaks of less than 5 minutes under strict protocols to be laid out in detail by the superintendent in consultation with the PSB Coordinator of School Health Services;
- while eating or drinking in a seated position;
- during certain outdoor activities at the discretion of PSB educators or staff.

Deleted: in physical education classes and extracurricular activities

A student's face covering is to be provided by the student's family. Families are recommended to provide students with two face coverings so that a spare will be readily available. Staff members are responsible for providing their own face coverings. However, the district will supply disposable face coverings for individuals who arrive at a building, or board school transportation without one.

If students are in violation of this policy, they will first be offered assistance with how to properly wear their face covering and/or be provided with a suitable face covering in order to be in compliance. In the interest of public safety, non-exempted students who intentionally refuse to wear a suitable face covering properly and/or even after being provided with one by the school will be sent home on an emergency basis while the building principal consults with the parent/guardians to determine whether an exception is appropriate. If an exception is not appropriate the students may be removed from the school building for in-person learning until such time as they can comply with the requirement or the requirement is lifted.

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Violations of this policy by staff will be handled in the same manner as other violations of School Committee policy.

Visitors in violation of this policy will be denied entry to the school/district facility.

This policy will remain in place until rescinded by the School Committee.

DRAFT

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