

<b>COMMITTEE NAME: COVID Task Force Meeting</b>
---

<b>DATE: 2/15/2022</b>
------------------------

<b>START TIME: 3:30 pm</b>	<b>END TIME: 4:50 pm</b>
----------------------------	--------------------------

**ATTENDANCE:**

<b>Nicole Bizzaro Susan Gualtieri Sean Meagher Joanne McCann Joe Parzych Venessa Grinnell Heather Clark William Furbush Cathy Zylinski Tom Rup Amy Newman Sarah Mahoney Heather Charkowski Austin Clark Stephanie Limperis Keely Gott</b>	<b>Nicole Clayton Sarah Bourdeau Rachael Pattee Dave Mylot Joy Page Mandy Murphy Meghan Sargent Shaina McTague Sarah Wagner Christine Vayda Ben Bourgoin John Scully Robert Hodgeman Tracy Bell Tiffany Snyder Becky Sarette Nick Deroucher Jess Marcoux Lise Johnson Jen Jacoby</b>
---	--

**AGENDA:**

1. Mask Optional/Mask Required Numbers a Comparison
2. Transition Plan to Mask Optional

## **TOPICS/DISCUSSIONS:**

Our task today is to make a recommendation to the board.

Mr. Furbush reviewed the total number of cases since the start of the school year. He reviewed the last several weeks -the trend is positive - very different then it was after the Christmas break. Mr. Furbush reviewed the Raymond numbers - we are not recording the active numbers in the same way. Mr. Furbush reviewed the Coe-Brown numbers - this is just the high school population. Same conclusion Raymond and Coe-Brown are similar to us with masks optional.

The group discussed different variables - we are unable to account for all the other variables in other schools. Mr. Furbush discussed the state changes ending masks - Massachusetts, Connecticut, Delaware. New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island.

**He would like to propose that we move to a mask optional plan.**

### **Considerations:**

Drawbacks of masks vs health benefits, Local numbers have drastically improved, unreliable reporting -accuracy of numbers no longer available, changes in DHHS requirements -no longer contact tracing - vaccines available to anyone 5 or older, mental health and stress of wearing masks, Verbal and non verbal impact of masks on education, mask quality and compliance versus 95, need to have the transition conversations, masking is not sustainable.

### **Proposed Epping Mask Optional Transition Plan**

**\*On March 21, 2022 Epping School District is Mask Optional**

**\*This timeline allows us to monitor COVID trends and confirm if they are sustained at current levels.**

**\*Allows enough notices to families if they wish to schedule vaccination appointments**

**\*If February break spike occurs it allows an additional safety strategy to remain in place until that spike has passed.**

Question about phases we have online - do we put that in place. Mr. Furbush shared that we stay at five day quarantine -DHHS recommendation. We still have a negative test to return. If they are negative they don't wear a mask. Mr. Furbush would suggest a slow transition - social distancing and other precautions. We would look every two weeks to see what we should change.

Question about waiting until March 21, 2022 date - waiting this long seems too long - parents can get their student a vaccination now - numbers in Epping have been fairly steady

Mr. Furbush shared that March 21st date is 15 school days as we have a week of vacation and a Professional Development day during this time.

### **Team Discussion:**

- recommendation to make this change effective as soon as the board meets.

- recommendation to give some time and not make it effective the next day.

-Question about the implementation of the masks in August - Mr. Furbush shared that their parents had a week.

- recommendation of March 7th instead of March 21st
- Question about having this start sooner due to concerns about Speech & Language services
- appreciate the fact the March 21st date to allow teachers to have shields put back in place
- Question about how quickly we can put shields back in place - Joe P. shared that custodial staff could be put back into place during vacation.

Mr. Furbush recapped the discussion - asked about March 7th and March 14th

- would appreciate a little buffer time to support students
- we need to think about students who need support with mask optional
- how do we support students with masks after the vacation
- the students who are having trouble will continue and we will continue to support them.
- 
- Question about masks if needed in the future.

Mr. Furbush shared a scenario now that DHHS no longer requires reporting. He discussed attendance rates - we need to continue with our honest conversations to make decisions that are best for the Epping Community - bringing it back to the Task Force for discussion.

- we need to think about conversations with students when we implement mask optional.
- what options do we have for students who are choosing to mask?

Mr. Furbush -thanked a member for bringing this back to the students - we do need to consider this.

- other schools have become optional and so the world is preparing for this - he would be surprised if anyone did know we are moving in that direction.
- she shared her experience talking with students - total excitement, anxiety or fear.
- Rec has been mask optional in all their programs -they have a whole range of students who do wear their masks and others who don't - students have been fair to each other. No one says anything to the students who wear masks - the students are so much better than the adults are. Concern that holding the date off is more stressful than just setting the date more quickly.
- waiting a week after vacation break is a good compromise to address a potential spike and avoid disappointing students if they have to return to masks. Proposing March 14th date.
- in favor of waiting a week or two - staff need some time to prepare

Mr. Furbush - recapped the discussion - we would like the school board to consider March 7th to March 21st as a date for making masks optional.

Question about whether or not we would return to masks if we had a spike.

Mr Furbush - we would meet as a group and discuss whether or not we need to change anything.

- would like us to bring this to the school board and they decide the dates - too much is put on the Task Force.
- Team Member - it is tough for teachers in this environment - it has been a long,difficult time to work in education - it is unfair to our teachers to not make a recommendation to the school board that isn't a specific date.

Team member - would like to have us poll teachers about dates - feels that students are the top priority Team member - we need to think about students who will struggle with anxiety

Team member - March is the anniversary of the pandemic- two years of hard work - giving teachers and custodians time to get ready- March date recommendation

Team member - we have teachers as well as students who have anxiety due to medical conditions but continue to put their students first - recommend March date after vacation as opposed to next week.

Mr. Furbush- asked if this group would agree to recommend the Monday after vacation.

Heather Clark it sounds like that this group is split - March 7th - March 14th -there will be parents at the meeting Thursday to discuss when they should come off.

Dave Mylot - there are parents that would like to see masks come off right away

Mr. Furbush - we all agree that we would like to remove masks with accommodations for students and staff who need support - making the transition with coordination and planning - some consensus in this room that the change should happen after the break. Mr. Furbush thanked everyone for the work this group has done for this process. We have had success and we respect each other -this has been a very successful process.

Dave Mylot asked everyone here to think about what students and staff need to go without masks in preparations for this upcoming vote.

Team member - I would like to recognize what teachers have had to go through this past years - her son has not been able to get what he needs due to covid but she wants to support the time we need to the process - she doesn't want this to be a you win/you lose for us - she would like to make sure the announcements are timely - pick a date - give the teachers time -the community time - take steps to make up what we have lost.

Conclusion of team - Mr. Furbush will present the facts and the School Board will decide.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING:**

March 15 2022 - EMHS Media Center