

Mr. Roberto,

We are writing you today as a group of disappointed parents angered by Aurora's 2021/2022 Opening Plans concerning mask usage. We were dismayed to learn an educational institution would ignore the scientific data and guidance of the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), and the Ohio Department of Health (ODH). All these institutions have voiced the importance of children being in the classroom this academic year. All have also strongly recommended universal masking. The CDC updated its language on August 4<sup>th</sup>, one day before the Final Forms update, to state, "recommended **universal** indoor masking for **all** students, staff, teachers, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status". Even the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) believes masking needs to occur. The AFT President, Randi Weingarten, released a statement in support of universal masking in schools. The closing paragraph stated, "We continue to be concerned about this variant, but our No. 1 priority remains a safe in-person school year in schools that can stay open. Given the new evidence, that means requiring everyone in school buildings to wear masks, and that's what we'll work with our school communities to do." The Ohio Education Association (OEA) President, Scott Di Mauro, stated "a safe return to in-person learning this fall is to follow the science and listen to the medical experts". The Office of the Governor also believes masking should be in place but stated they too do not have the authority to mandate such an order.

You had the opportunity to hear Dr. Tracey Lemonovich, an infectious disease expert, make a statement at the July 26, 2021, board meeting. It seems her statement fell on deaf ears.

The Aurora Board of Education (BoE) and Administrative staff have decided to use semantics (i.e. the word "recommend") as a way to side step requiring masking within the Aurora School District. Not one of the previously mentioned institutions is a regulating body with the authority to mandate face coverings. They also did not use the word "optional". The BoE and Administrative staff have the authority and obligation (such as neighboring communities of Bio-med Science Academy, Chagrin Falls, Kenston, Solon, and Twinsburg) to enforce these recommendations. The purpose is to greatly reduce the spread of COVID (and the Delta variant), keep schools open, and maximize in-class learning. If Aurora's goals are the same, why has a reactive versus proactive policy been adapted?

The science is clear, the Delta variant is a real danger to our children and nearly twice as contagious as prior variants. All across the country, more children are getting sick and finding themselves hospitalized. Yet, the vast majority of schools have not even opened. How is the school following best practices to protect children with substantial medical issues and those who are immunocompromised if masks are optional? This not only includes the children, but also every family member. Wearing a mask is about protecting your neighbor, not just yourself. It is not only socially responsible but also an opportunity to teach children how to do the right thing for their community. Lead by example!

As parents, we have many questions and concerns. This letter outlines some of them. We are open to a formal meeting with you, each school's principal, and the BoE to discuss the matter further. The meeting would obviously need to occur very soon and prior to the start of the academic year. You stated Aurora

is not in a bubble. This could not be truer. Yet, the BoE and Administrative staff put themselves in a bubble to make a decision concerning very real health threats to **our** children. Statements were heard but seemingly ignored. Parents as a whole were not brought in. It seems the evidentiary science was also excluded. A survey was released to parents **after** the masking policy was put in place. Our understanding based on requested results is approximately 50% of parents prefer masking. Our questions and concerns include:

**Why are masks not required now? What are the tangible thresholds of the 35 or 40 data points (i.e. how will the decision be made) that will facilitate requiring masks? It cannot be a moving target.**

- Portage County transmissivity is substantial, according to the CDC.
- Portage County is currently seeing its highest 7-day average in 3 months.
- Zip 44202 is currently at 162 cases per 100K in the last 2 weeks (as of 08/08).
- Companies such as Walmart, Home Depot, Target, Sam's Club, McDonald's, Starbucks, etc. have reinstated mandatory masks for employees. They are trying to do what they can to protect employees and their customers. Why can't we?

**Is there a moral/ethical/legal liability carried by the school when best practices are not followed?**

- The 2020/2021 school year reopening plan followed the recommendations of the CDC, AAP, and Governor's K-12 reopening plans. Why was it decided to not follow the same recommendations to start this year if it worked so well last year?
- Starting strict and easing masking requirements after the Delta variant wave has passed and when the children under the age of 12 have the choice to be vaccinated is not only the responsible decision, it is also easier to ease requirements than make them more stringent.
  - E.g. ease the masking requirements of older vaccinated students, wait a month while monitoring the tracked data points to determine an impact. If it is positive, ease masking requirements to the next age group/school down. This also buys time for the under 12 vaccine to hopefully be available for parents who want their children protected.
- The CDC states anyone showing signs of an infectious disease should stay home.
  - You state in your transcript and under Slide 2, "those who are not feeling 100% to wear a mask to school". As parents, we take this as you encouraging sick children to come to school. Is that a best practice during a pandemic?
- Regarding masks, the Final Forms transcript stated, "explain how we kept a pulse on the virus this past school year which our community as a whole viewed as a success".
  - Last school year was masked, the community was masked, and there was no Delta variant. How can we expect to have similar success as last year when the single most effective, and current, preventative measure for unvaccinated people is no longer required? Other changes from last year's successful measures include less social distancing as well as more children in the classrooms and schools. The two plans are not comparable.

## Did the teachers get a say in the making policy?

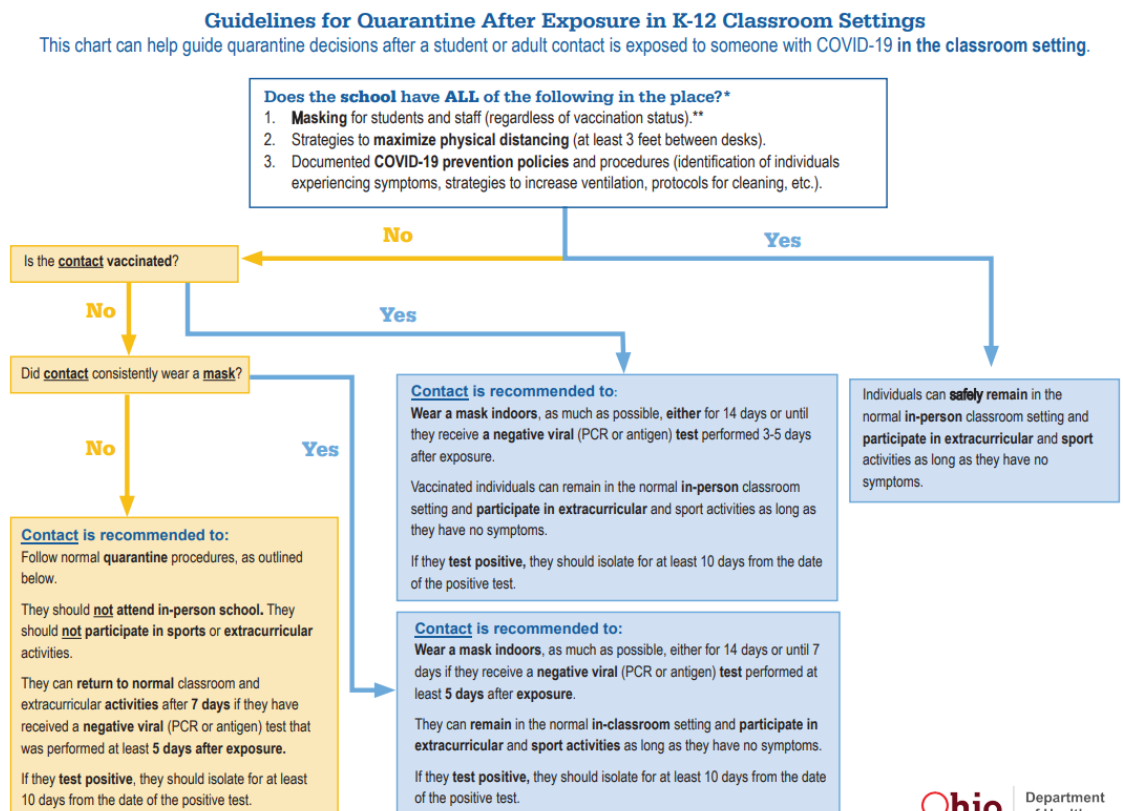
## Will we know the vaccination status of our child's teachers and staff?

## What is the anti-bullying stance on children intimidating (intentionally or not) others wearing masks?

- Parents have already witnessed games at public parks where the goal is to pull off another child's mask. It will happen, and should not.
- Are teachers going to enforce a parent's wish for a child to wear a mask? As parents, we do not know what happens when our child is under the supervision of a teacher or aid.
- This does not seem fair to the teacher, but the BoE and Administrative staff have decided to put this additional task on them.
- We have concerns that children wearing masks versus unmasked will drive social division within the schools. What is the policy to circumvent this as it occurs while still offering masked children the level of protection sought by their parents? The science is clear that an unmasked, unvaccinated person is a health risk to other people. Especially those who are unvaccinated.

## What is the back-up plan when children start getting sick?

- Guidelines for Quarantine After Exposure in K-12 Classroom Settings Flow Chart (2021/2022)



\*This flowchart applies only to COVID-19 exposures that occurred within a K-12 classroom setting. It is not applicable to exposure in the community, extracurricular, or sports environment.

\*\*If masking has not been implemented, local health departments (LHDs) may use this workflow if it can be established that the person WITH COVID-19 and individuals within 3 to 6 feet of the infected person were consistently and correctly wearing masks.

- Will the ‘Guidelines for Quarantine After Exposure’ be followed?
- Will virtual learning be available for children out of school for extended periods of time?
- Portage County’s vaccination rates are not great.
  - Community vaccination rates discussed by the CDC.
    - Portage is below the national and state vaccination rates
      - Portage County (46% fully, 49% 1 dose)
      - Ohio (47% fully, 51% 1 dose)
      - National (51% fully, 59% 1 dose)

**What is the lunch strategy for children who are masked versus those who are not?**

- Will masked children be offered tables away from unmasked children?
- How much distancing will be available in the lunchroom when masks are removed to eat?
- Is it possible to eat lunch outside, weather permitting?

**If no changes in the masking policy occur, is it possible for masked kids to be within the same class or at least breakout groups within a classroom be organized by masked and unmasked if appropriate distancing cannot be maintained? This obviously assumes breakout groups can and will occur.**

We would like to close this letter by thanking you for your time and attention. We know this matter is important to you as it is to us. We recognize the learning structure (i.e. Option A and Option B) over the last year is not sustainable. We are trying to find a solution in the middle ground, everyone safely in the classroom using best practices as strongly recommended and encouraged by the medical experts. In the end, we want what is best for our children’s education, social development, and health. We hope this policy can be reconsidered, resolved quickly, and is not driven by political ideologies unnecessarily putting our children at risk. It is about protecting kids who (as of now) are unable to protect themselves. Shouldn’t that be the primary goal of every school every day, pandemic or no pandemic?

Sincerely,

Concerned Parents of the Aurora School District

*P.S. Digital signatures as of 08/10/2021 are on the next page. The list is growing as the topic has traction in the community but we wanted to get this letter to you as soon as possible.*