

Dear SDMA Board Members,

Thank you for your time. I know the mask decision weighs heavily on you all and it is a decision that you will not take lightly.

I would like to advocate for universal masking for all students and staff in the SDMA. Not only for those that are healthy, but those, like one of my kiddos, that have an underlying health condition that puts them at especially high risk if they contracted COVID-19. And also, for those friends or families of healthy students/or staff.

My kiddo, in particular, has a rare lung disease that the medical field doesn't know much about. As you can imagine, there are a wide range of health issues that may be affecting the students and staff of SDMA. These include, but are not limited to: Cystic Fibrosis, Cerebral Palsy, Diabetes, Nutrition Disorders, Down's Syndrome, Heart Conditions, Asthma, Cancer, Immunocompromised states, and other chronic conditions. Families of students or staff may also have any of these conditions and can be affected if a student contracts the virus and does not have symptoms and lives with them, or visits them.

As a parent of a kiddo with a high-risk health condition, I sit here helpless because my child is not eligible for vaccination at this point and vaccination is the most effective defense.

I humbly ask that you please take into consideration that there are still parents who would like their children to be vaccinated, but cannot do so at this point. The only thing we are able to do to protect our children is to comply with the mitigation strategies put forth by medical experts that are closely following this rampant infection.

Why don't I just keep my children home then, you ask? I want my children to have a normal education too. They need the interaction, socialization, formal curriculum, and stable schedule. They deserve it and I, as many other parents, cannot keep my children home and juggle virtual schooling, as I often work overtime. Other parents experiencing similar situations are working MORE than one job and it is just impossible to make ends meet and ensure an adequate education for their children.

Masks are easy. One good thing about kiddos is that they are more resilient than we know. Think back to last school year when masks were required, it became part of the normal school day and was incorporated beautifully into daily activities by your amazing staff. We know that if we lead by example, kiddos will comply. If we support masking and don't make it an option, they will follow our lead and our expectations.

If we make masking optional, we know that even those that want to wear a mask, likely won't because those that are around them aren't. We all know that even if a kiddo is taught to be their own person and make their own decisions, ultimately, they don't want to be different from their friends, and if their friends aren't wearing masks, they won't.

Why do I think or know masks work? Again, I reference last school year. I as a parent received minimal letters stating that there was an illness going around the classroom. In a typical year without masking, parents (I) would receive multiple letters throughout the year stating there was strep throat, GI bugs, common colds, etc. going around their children's classes. We did not see those illnesses in large amounts last school year. This is because of masks (and also the diligent hand hygiene and disinfection that your wonderful staff implemented into daily activities). Germs were contained in masks. Kids weren't sharing their saliva or snot or coughs as per usual because their noses and mouths were covered. Masks are a barrier.

If universal masking was in place, the virus would have a harder time transmitting because of the barrier and kiddos would be in school for more days vs. out sick or considered a close contact, etc.

I do not expect to sway your decision just for my family, but I hope that you can put yourselves into the shoes of all of those children and families who are high risk, and/or those families who would like to get their children vaccinated but are waiting helplessly for the vaccine to be approved. And also, in the shoes of those that don't have high risk or underlying health conditions, because we know that COVID has also taken the lives of those that are otherwise healthy or caused long term ill effects.

With the new information about the Delta variant being more transmissible, it is even more important that we use every measure that we can to protect ourselves and those around us, and ESPECIALLY our children.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Kari (a mom who cares about your life, and his life, and her life, and their life, and EVERYONE'S lives)