

10/10/21

Dear School Board and Superintendent.

I read the proposed changes to the masking policy that will be discussed at the school board meeting on 10/11/21, and I have several concerns.

- Revisiting this decision less than two weeks after the new K-6 mask requirement is confusing for students, staff, and families. Many families have made decisions to keep their children in school (or take them out) based on this new policy.
- This will not only cause confusion, but it is making educators' and administrators' jobs even more difficult. After hearing from so many teachers at the last board meeting, we realize that not masking was creating an untenable situation for a wide variety of reasons. All the K-6 teachers, schools, and administrators have spent time doing an excellent job communicating this week, and everyone did a great job with the mask requirement. This is now the routine.
- Students are starting to lose trust and confidence in adults due to so many changes and because this issue is being revisiting so frequently. Children are experiencing stress, anxiety, frustration etc. thinking about the fact that things could change constantly – they need and want routine and structure so they know what to expect.
- The kids just want to be in school learning – they are not the ones having a problem with wearing masks – it is the adults and the messages that some adults are giving them. It is the adults who are having the problem. If we were to ask many of the kids, many of them are fine wearing masks if it means they can be in school most of the time. It has been a cooperative, peaceful, unified week with a lot of learning and little stress or tension.
- The current policy last week should remain until it was originally proposed to remain – until 6 weeks after K-6 kids are able to be vaccinated. It will give consistency and protect the children who are too young to be vaccinated. The current policy is based on science.
- The policy won't reduce the number of exclusions, because if we wait to mask until a student is infected, we are too late and there will be more infections.

Regarding the statement by Skillings questioning the gender support plan and I have several concerns:

- As for Skillings statement that the topic has been addressed at every meeting by a constituent. This is untrue, since the person who speaks to this issue every time is not part of this school district. She has no business here and should not be speaking on this issue. Also, due to the separation of church and state, the reasons behind the concern are religious based, which has no place in a public school.
- As for being new to the board and needing to better understand the plan, that is Skillings' responsibility to do this, and she should have already done this considering she has already been on the board for 6 months. And, as a constituent before she was a school board member, she had ample opportunity to attend previous school board meetings leading up to the plan being adopted and ask questions.
- Regarding the concern about lack of parental involvement, at times for the physical and psychological safety and well-being of the child/student, it is crucial that parent(s) not be notified or involved. Children are sometimes physically and/or verbally abused by their parent(s), they are sometimes kicked out of the house, and are rejected in other ways at home. Children who are rejected by parents are more likely to attempt and die by suicide than non-LGBTQ+ youth.

- Regarding the statement that we already have anti-harassment and bullying policies that cover Title 9 – this is not enough! Policies that aim to address individual bad behavior distract from the need to address structural, cultural, and ideological system changes necessary to fully support and affirm LGBTQ+ youths’ full identities. (Farley & Leonardi, 2021)

In closing, I want to share some information with you as to why we need to full support and affirm our LGBTQ+ youth.

The Trever Project (2019) National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health.

This is the first wide-ranging report from a cross-sectional national survey of LGBTQ youth across the United States. With over 34,000 respondents, it is the largest survey of LGBTQ youth mental health ever conducted and provides a critical understanding of the experiences impacting their lives.

Among some of the key findings of the report from LGBTQ youth in the survey:

- 39% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past twelve months, with more than half of transgender and non-binary youth having seriously considered
- 71% of LGBTQ youth reported feeling sad or hopeless for at least two weeks in the past year
- Less than half of LGBTQ respondents were out to an adult at school, with youth less likely to disclose their gender identity than sexual orientation • 2 in 3 LGBTQ youth reported that someone tried to convince them to change their sexual orientation or gender identity, with youth who have undergone conversion therapy more than twice as likely to attempt suicide as those who did not
- 71% of LGBTQ youth in our study reported discrimination due to either their sexual orientation or gender identity
- 58% of transgender and non-binary youth reported being discouraged from using a bathroom that corresponds to their gender identity
- 76% of LGBTQ youth felt that the recent political climate impacted their mental health or sense of self
- 87% of LGBTQ youth said it was important to them to reach out to a crisis intervention organization that focuses on LGBTQ youth and 98% said a safe space social networking site for LGBTQ youth would be valuable to them

Sincerely,

Lisa Quinn-Lee, PhD, MSW, LICSW