

November 8, 2021

Re: Strengthening other aspects of the covid safety plan if mask mandate expires

Dear Members of the Board of Education,

I regret that I am unable to attend this evening's meeting--my family is in quarantine from a school exposure last week. Thank you for the opportunity to submit my remarks electronically.

Exclusion rates related to covid have been looking really good in our schools over the past several weeks, but I fear they will once again rise to unacceptable levels if the covid safety plan were to simply go back to the way it was in mid-September.

If extending the mask mandate is not politically feasible, the board should consider strengthening other aspects of the covid safety plan with the goal of keeping as many students in the classroom as possible.

It is clear that more action is needed. In the weeks following the change to optional quarantine in September, exclusion rates were well into the 20 percents for one of our schools. Optional quarantine may work for some communities to keep exclusions down, but our community has too many families that follow quarantine guidelines for this to work here.

Reducing exclusions and keeping the schools open should be a primary goal of the covid safety plan. There are a couple of ways to strengthen the covid safety plan to help with this outcome.

One option would be to walk back some aspects of the quarantine optional plan. Requiring students to wear masks if they choose to opt out of quarantine would be a good compromise that would keep students in school while helping to reduce exclusions from sickness and close contact.

Another option is to allow administrators and teachers to strongly encourage masking. Information could be shared with parents by multiple avenues explaining how masks may reduce the likelihood of their child experiencing covid-related exclusions. Sharing information like this would actually increase the parents' freedom in this instance, since freedom of choice requires full knowledge of the facts. Censorship is the opposite of freedom.

If the current mask mandate is allowed to lapse, other changes to the SDMA covid safety plan would be needed to help keep exclusions down to an acceptable level. Now is the time to make those changes.

Thank you,
Monica Berrier from Menomonie