



SPECIAL BOARD PUBLIC MINUTES

**Tuesday, November 22, 2022
Board Room
Administration Building
133 Greenbank Road
Ottawa, Ontario**

Trustees Present: Lyra Evans, Alysha Aziz, Justine Bell, Donna Blackburn, Donna Dickson, Jennifer Jennekens, Nili Kaplan-Myrth, Matthew Lee, Cathryne Milburn (electronic communication), Suzanne Nash, Amanda Presley, Lynn Scott, Tabarak Al-Delaimi (Student Trustee), Antong Hou (Student Trustee)

Staff Present: Camille Williams-Taylor (Director of Education), Brett Reynolds (Associate Director of Education), Randy Gerrior (Associate Director, Business Operations), Michele Giroux (Executive Officer, Corporate Services), James Proulx (Executive Officer, Information Technology and Digital Transformation), Mary Jane Farrish (Superintendent of Instruction), Paula Hall (Superintendent of People, Culture and Leadership), Shawn Lehman (Superintendent of Instruction), Shannon Smith (Superintendent of Instruction), Carolyn Tanner (Human Rights and Equity Advisor), Stacey Kay (Manager of Learning Support Services), Amy Hannah (Superintendent of Instruction), Sandy Owens (Manager, Business & Learning Technologies), Diane Pernari (Manager of Communications & Information Services), Nicole Guthrie (Manager, Board Services), Michael Guilbault (Central Audio/Visual Technical Specialist), Marco Paladino (Training and Support Specialist), Darren Gatley (Senior Board Coordinator), Mellissa Applewaihe (Board/Committee Coordinator)

1. Call to Order - Chair of the Board

Chair Lyra Evans called the public meeting to order at 6:45 p.m.

2. Land Acknowledgement

Chair Lyra Evans acknowledged that the meeting is taking place on unceded Algonquin Territory and thanked the Algonquin Nations for hosting the meeting on their land.

3. Approval of the Agenda

Moved by Trustee Aziz, seconded by Trustee Presley,

THAT the agenda be approved.

Carried

4. Declarations of Interest

See specific Agenda Item - Notice of Motion, Re: Wearing of Masks for Educators, Staff and Students, Trustee Kaplan-Myrth (Agenda Item 8.1).

5. Delegations

5.1 Oral Delegations

1. Wade Shanley, re How a Mask Mandate Could Affect Students in OCSB Schools

Mr. Shanley requested that trustees be willing to consider the voices of their constituents and expressed the view that less than 10 percent of Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) students wear masks and that most students and families do not support masking. He suggested that 80% of constituents do not support masking, and that some students are bullied for not wearing a mask.

Mr. Shanley noted that Ottawa Public Health (OPH) has not imposed a mask mandate and that the language in the proposed notice of motion to wear masks until the end of flu season would require masking until early spring, 2023. He expressed the view that a healthy unmasked child does not pose a threat.

2. Adam Saunders, re Reinstating Masks in OCDSB Schools

Mr. Saunders introduced himself as the parent of two OCDSB students. He expressed the view that there is an urgent need to reinstate masks due to the acute epidemic of viral cases and collapsing healthcare system.

He noted that current viral cases, including long-term COVID-19, can be addressed through engineering clean indoor air systems. Mr. Saunders added that his delegation submission contained details of specific engineering solutions.

Mr. Saunders clarified that the short-term solution would be masking, and the long-term solution would be an investment in technology.

4. Raywat Deondandan, Adoption of Mask Mandate in OCDSB Schools

Mr. Deondandan introduced himself as an epidemiologist at the University of Ottawa. He expressed the view that there is no evidence demonstrating that mask-wearing is harmful and that mask-wearing has become politicized.

Mr. Deonandan noted that some families cannot afford to keep sick students at home and send sick children to school. He explained that this problem primarily affected the socioeconomic disadvantaged and immunocompromised population.

6. Carolyn Moffat, re Reinstating Mask Mandate in Schools

Ms. Moffat noted that her four children attend OCDSB schools and that Ottawa faces a threat of COVID-19, Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) and influenza. Ms. Moffat stated that masks could help prevent illness.

Ms. Moffat requested that the OCDSB impose a mask mandate as hospitals are in crisis, and the Board should have consistent practices in place so families are assured of the safety of their children under the care of the OCDSB. She noted that Ottawa is not the only region to experience a paediatric crisis, and that there is a risk that timely care will not be available for children at the current rate of hospital admissions.

7. Salma Al-Shehabi, re Choice of Masking in OCDSB Schools

Ms. Al-Shehabi introduced herself as the mother of a student attending an OCDSB school. She noted that the ability to communicate and see faces is critical for a child's development and that online learning should be an option for families concerned for their children.

Ms. Al-Shehabi emphasized that families should keep their children at home if they are sick to ensure that they are healthy enough to return to school. She noted that personal hygiene, such as regular handwashing, plays a key role in protecting from COVID-19.

In response to a query, Ms. Al-Shehabi highlighted that from an equity lens, she is not in the high income bracket, but she recently kept her son at home when he was sick. She added that wearing a mask is a personal choice that older students should be able to make, while younger students can have their families decide.

Ms. Al-Shehabi noted that she is aware of several families who have moved from OCDSB to the Ottawa Catholic School Board due to the OCDSB mask mandates during the 2021-2022 school year.

9. Blake Maguire, re Opposition to Mask Mandate in OCDSB Schools

Mr. Maguire reminded trustees that the public present at the meeting had elected them. He noted that he is a father of four and that his children had suffered from anxiety and depression during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of his children had dropped from being an A grade average student to a C grade average. Mr. Maguire noted that masking is not suitable for students' well-being, adding that many children believe that students who are not wearing masks can make them sick, affecting the relationships between students.

Mr. Maguire expressed the view that students should have the freedom to choose whether they wear a mask.

5.2 Written Delegations

Written delegations were included for information.

6. Report from the Board (In Camera)

Moved in substitution for Trustee Bell, Trustee Lee reported that the Board met in camera earlier this evening and reports and recommends as follows:

Moved by Lynn Scott

Seconded by Matthew Lee

THAT staff be authorized to proceed, as directed in Board in camera, with respect to a human resources matter.

For (11): Lyra Evans (Trustee), Alysha Aziz (Trustee), Justine Bell (Trustee), Donna Blackburn (Trustee), Donna Dickson (Trustee), Jennifer Jennekens (Trustee), Nili Kaplan-Myrth (Trustee), Matthew Lee (Trustee), Suzanne Nash (Trustee), Amanda Presley (Trustee), and Lynn Scott (Trustee)

Carried (11 to 0)

7. Presentation

7.1 Dr. Lindy Samson, Chief of Staff and Chief Medical Officer at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO)

Chair Lyra Evans introduced Dr. Lindy Samson, Chief of Staff and Chief Medical Officer at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) and asked her to make her presentation. Dr. Samson noted that she is also a paediatrician and infectious disease specialist and that there is evidence

to demonstrate the positive influence on children's physical, mental and developmental health when they consistently attend school.

During her presentation, the following points were noted:

- Children attending the emergency room (ER) on the evening of 21 November 2022 were required to wait 13 hours to see a physician; despite the addition of a new clinic that operates 12 hours a day to alleviate the strain on the system;
- The Intensive Care Unit (ICU) was at 200% occupancy for critical care on 21 November 2022 with half the children located in non-traditional ICU locations. The unit was at 185% occupancy for children not requiring critical care, but with significant illness. Many children needing non-critical care had to receive care in the emergency room (ER) department for several days as there was a lack of available beds;
- Due to the surge in occupancy, hospital staff have been redeployed from their regular positions to assist in the care of overflow. This has resulted in the postponement of clinical appointments and surgeries, affecting families and children who have already had a significant wait time;
- There is a unique surge in Ottawa of mainly RSV, COVID-19 and influenza, although other viral infections are circulating. These viruses that are normally encountered at different times are all simultaneously spreading amongst children in particular;
- The three factors that have created the capacity and staffing bottleneck are:
 - The length of the viral spread which has already been one month and is projected to continue for four to six weeks;
 - The number of children requiring admission to CHEO and the level of critical and intensive care they require is more than CHEO has previously experienced at one time; and
 - Every children's hospital in Canada is experiencing the same viral surge and associated issues, meaning that there is no opportunity for other hospitals to provide assistance or resources.

Dr. Samson noted that CHEO has exhausted resources to support a further increase in the current viral surge, advising that evidence supports the effectiveness of masking in preventing transmission in healthcare and school settings. She noted that additional protection measures, such as

staying at home when sick, handwashing and ensuring eligible vaccinations are up to date, could also contribute to slowing the surge.

Dr. Samson added that school boards should maintain adequate and equitable indoor air quality, ventilation, and environmental cleaning. She noted that a mask mandate could temporarily offset the surge in viral activity, admissions to the ER and ICU, and the healthcare crisis.

Chair Lyra Evans called the meeting into recess at 7:37 p.m.

Chair Lyra Evans called the meeting back to order at 8:10 p.m.

Dr. Samson suggested that every action possible to alleviate the pressure on the healthcare system should be undertaken.

Dr. Samson followed with a question and answer session for trustees.

Trustee Bell called a Point of Order and requested a recess due to the behaviour of the public attending the meeting.

Chair Lyra Evans called the meeting into recess at 8:22 p.m.

Chair Lyra Evans called the meeting back to order at 8:56 p.m.

7.2 Dr. Vera Etches, Medical Officer of Health for Ottawa Public Health (OPH)

The written submission from Dr. Vera Etches was included for information.

8. Matters for Action

8.1 Notice of Motion, Re: Wearing of Masks for Educators, Staff and Students, Trustee Kaplan-Myrth

Moved by Trustee Kaplan-Myrth,

WHEREAS there has been a significant increase in COVID-19 cases, and influenza cases, and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) cases, and other serious respiratory and airborne diseases in the City of Ottawa;

WHEREAS these put the health and safety of educators and students in jeopardy, as demonstrated by the intensive care unit (ICU) and emergency room crises at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) and the other Ottawa-area hospitals;

WHEREAS recent statements from Dr. Lindy Samson, the Chief of Staff of CHEO, and Dr. Vera Etches, the Medical Officer of Health for Ottawa Public Health (OPH), and Dr. Kieran Moore, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, strongly recommend wearing a well-fitted mask in any indoor setting to curb the spread of respiratory viruses;

WHEREAS Ottawa Public Health acknowledges that increased respiratory virus activity is causing people to miss work and school at unprecedented

levels, and OPH fully supports any business or organization that chooses to implement a mask wearing policy in Ottawa;

WHEREAS there is no evidence of harm, to an adult or child's physical or mental health, from wearing of masks, and there is strong evidence of harm caused by infections with COVID-19, influenza, RSV, and other viral illnesses;

WHEREAS safety in schools must be governed by the precautionary principle, as well as principles of equity and accessibility, the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) has a responsibility to take steps to reduce health and safety risks to all educators and students;

WHEREAS under Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, failing to institute or maintain health protections in schools further disadvantages an already disempowered group: educators and students with health vulnerabilities and disabilities;

AND WHEREAS it is possible to obtain and distribute the highest quality N95 masks to educators and families that cannot afford to purchase their own masks;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED,

THAT staff be directed to require, from an occupational health and safety perspective, use of surgical or N95 masks by all educators, staff, and students in all OCDSB buildings and in all OCDSB-led activity, with the exception of musical/performing arts instruction or sports in which masks cannot be worn, and with the exception of nutritional breaks;

THAT the policy to require masks will take effect on 23 November 2022;

THAT children or adults with written medical exemptions from their physicians on the basis of documented disability will not be subject to this mandate;

THAT enforcement of, and consequences for violations of the mask requirement, will be subject to same operational rules that govern other OCDSB health and safety policies and codes of conduct; and

THAT the mask requirement will remain in place until such time as Ottawa Public Health declares that influenza season has ended in the City of Ottawa, CHEO pediatric ICU occupancy is less than 85% for a period of at least two weeks, and Ottawa Public Health no longer advises the public to wear a mask to protect against exposure to airborne and respiratory viruses in indoor spaces.

In introducing the motion, Trustee Kaplan-Myrth expressed the view that it was difficult for the school community to distinguish between reliable and

unreliable information. Trustee Kaplan-Myrth added that she has heard views from those in support of and against masking, and health experts. Trustee Kaplan Myrth noted that masking would benefit low-income, multi-generational families who are more likely to live with young and elderly family members and who may have existing health conditions.

Trustee Kaplan-Myrth suggested that the OCDSB take action as there are immunocompromised students who are at high risk of being hospitalized. She added that masks are most effective when the majority of the community uses them.

Moved by Trustee Lee, seconded by Trustee Scott,

THAT the Board adopt the rules of committee.

Carried

An amendment moved by Trustee Kaplan-Myrth,

THAT in the first clause of the motion, the words "or other well fit masks" be inserted before "surgical."

A sub-amendment moved by Trustee Scott,

THAT the words "well fit masks" be changed to "well fitting masks."

Carried

An amendment moved by Trustee Kaplan-Myrth,

THAT in the first clause of the motion, the words "or other well fitting masks" be inserted before "surgical."

Carried

An amendment moved by Trustee Kaplan-Myrth,

THAT in the first clause of the motion, the words "during the instructional day" be inserted after "all OCDSB-led activity,"

Defeated

An amendment moved by Trustee Kaplan-Myrth,

THAT in the first clause of the motion, the words "OCDSB buildings and in all" be struck.

Moved by Trustee Bell,

THAT debate be closed.

Carried

An amendment moved by Trustee Kaplan-Myrth,

THAT in the first clause of the motion, the words "OCDSB buildings and in all" be struck.

Defeated

An amendment moved by Trustee Blackburn,

THAT in the first clause of the motion, the words "with exception of OSTA buses" be inserted before "musical/performing arts instruction."

In introducing the motion, Trustee Blackburn noted that in her capacity as a president of the Ottawa Student Transportation Authority (OSTA), she is aware that adding another layer to a challenging job will cause the loss of more bus drivers. Trustee Blackburn advised that if the amendment is not included in the motion, the OCDSB will encounter significantly more recruitment issues.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Trustee Milburn, declared a potential, deemed pecuniary interest.' Trustee Milburn did not participate in the discussion related to masking on OSTA buses.

Director Williams-Taylor noted that the issue could not be discussed without considering the feasibility or capacity of implementation. Director Williams-Taylor expressed her view that this is not something that could be achieved operationally and that the exceptions within the school district were infinite. Director Williams-Taylor noted her opinion that extensive debate on an issue that is impossible to facilitate was not good use of trustee time.

An amendment moved by Trustee Blackburn,

THAT in the first clause of the motion, the words "with exception of OSTA buses" be inserted before "musical/performing arts instruction."

Carried

Trustee Jennekens expressed her concerns regarding how the enforcement of a mask mandate could affect students with special needs or students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and the implications of families obtaining a doctor's medical exemption.

Director Williams-Taylor noted that access to a doctor and the affordability of the cost for a medical exemption pose accessibility concerns.

Director Williams-Taylor noted that the enforcement would place school leaders and educators in the forefront of difficult situations.

An amendment moved by Trustee Kaplan-Myrth,

THAT in the third clause of the motion, the words "written medical exemptions from their physicians on the basis of documented disability" be struck and replaced by "disabilities, or to whom wearing a mask would pose a hardship, or interfere with their ability to function as students or in their educational or staff roles."

The 10:30 vote failed to receive the required 2/3 majority to continue*

Moved by Trustee Scott,

THAT the meeting be continued at the earliest opportunity, subject to consultation with staff,

Carried.

Supplemental Information

1. Report 22-086 Information on Mandatory Mask Mandates
Provided for information.

9. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:30 p.m.

Lyra Evans, Chair of the Board