



Special Session Minutes
Desert Sky Montessori
Virtual Meeting
March 8, 2022

Jessica Loukonen called the meeting to order at 5:32pm.

Present: Jessica Loukonen, Cara Nowak, John Eskew, David Trexler, Kevin McKennon, Daisy Sexton

Also Present: Jodie Borgia, Julia Sutter, Heather Phillips, Louise Wilson, Pascaline Meyers, Deli Thordarson, Kyle Thordarson, Camilo Marino, Jeff Amaral, Katie Cruz, Bianca Krzesniak, Meagan Stephenson, Heather Amaral, Hye Sun Marino, Amanda Skaflestad, Steve Johnson, Tara Larkin, Ali Norwood, Ryan Norwood, Kristan Banks

Jessica Loukonen: welcomes everyone to the meeting; explains the results of the parent survey on masking that was sent out to the community; explains what the rules are around open forum and what the public can expect for the remainder of the meeting; asks for all to be respectful

OPEN FORUM

Meagan Stephenson: would like for masking to be optional; their personal experience with their daughter having to mask has not gone well; thinks it is time to move on for the mental and physical health of the children; thinks how the staff approaches this with the children is important

Heather Amaral: questions why DSM is considering not following Bend-La Pine School District [BLP] for the first time in the past 2 years; thinks the board needs to respect what ODE [Oregon Department of Education] is saying about new masking rules; wants masking to be optional

Ryan Norwood: thinks that Covid is still a risk, but the bigger risk is to the kids if they remain masked; wants masks to be optional

Jeff Amaral: thinks that the justifications for DSM to continue masking would have to be in extraordinary circumstances only; would like for individual masking decisions respected for all parents

BUSINESS

A. Masking Options Discussion

- a. Jodie Borgia: would like to speak to why DSM is able to make different decisions than BLP
 - i. Charter schools are considered their own district
 - ii. BLP has a Covid safety team that works alongside them, so DSM has tried to follow what they were recommending

1. DSM has had to deviate a bit from their plans in the past, ie because of social distancing requirements and DSM's limited space
- iii. It is ultimately up to Jodie Borgia as Head of School to lay out what safety plan will be put into place for DSM
- b. Jodie Borgia: some pieces of the Covid plan are statewide mandates; others may be recommended but not required
 - i. Quarantining and social distancing are still strongly advised by ODE
 1. Would like to continue to verbally screen the children while they are arriving in the morning and continue to cohort
 2. Will continue to social distance—striving for 3 feet apart—as much as possible, but that is harder in a Montessori classroom compared to a traditional classroom
 3. Will be required to isolate for positive cases of Covid: children or staff will have to stay home for 5 days, then mask upon returning for days 6-10
 - ii. Would also like to continue to put an emphasis on handwashing and hygiene; continue weekly screening and diagnostic testing for the parents who have opted into this; will offer enhanced exposure testing; will prioritize outdoor time
 - iii. Schools are required to clearly communicate to the community what they are doing around masking; required to reteach staff, families, and students about the safety protocols; continue to notify families if there is a positive case in their child's cohort
 - iv. All staff will be respectful around the students' individual choices around masking and will not be policing who is and who is not wearing a mask; all staff will provide an inclusive environment for all students
- c. Jessica Loukonen: [as a hospital employee] it is clear that there has been a decline in Covid cases since the beginning of the pandemic: there is currently only one Covid case in the hospital, and no pediatric cases; thinks it is nice to find ourselves in this place to make masks optional
- d. Daisy Sexton: wonders if most of our families have been open to the different forms of Covid testing being offered through the school
 - i. Jodie Borgia: 72 children are enrolled in the weekly testing program, although only 20-30 are sending them as of now; around 75-80% of families are open to exposure testing: does reach out to any families affected by an exposure case to see if they would like to change their minds
- e. Kevin McKennon: wonders what the driving factor for the masking mandate to be lifted earlier than originally announced was; wonders if the language around "pausing" is driven by the county's risk level
 - i. Jodie Borgia: we are in medium risk currently; most decisions are currently being based on hospitalizations; ODE can make the decision to reverse optional masking at any time; BLP is planning to stick with optional masking as long as it

remains a local decision, but will go back to universal masking if ODE mandates it

- f. John Eskew: thanks everyone for their comments; thinks that we do not have to vote on this but that we should as it would acknowledge our decision to follow BLP
 - i. Cara Nowak: wonders if we should vote on this, as a “yes” vote or a “no” vote would amount to the same thing, ie continuing to align with BLP and joining BLP in optional masking
 - ii. John Eskew: sees the vote as an acknowledgement by the board, but does not feel strongly either way
 - iii. Cara Nowak: would hesitate to have a vote: it would acknowledge the board’s support, but worries it would also take away some of our autonomy and flexibility as we have had to modify how we follow BLP’s policies around this in the past
 - iv. Jessica Loukonen: thinks we could come back to reassess and make decisions from there
 - v. David Trexler: does not know what the correct procedural response would be; does believe there to be a consensus among the board that following BLP with optional masking would be the best course of action; wonders if Jodie Borgia would feel restricted by the board voting on this; wonders if anyone has another option they would like to propose
 - 1. Jodie Borgia: decided to come to the board in the first place because of concerns around the children missing school and wanted the backing of the board on whatever decision was made; is attending weekly meetings and knows what tweaks and changes should be made; does not think the board needs to vote if all members are in agreement, but would like the board’s backing as she moves forward with writing the new safety plan; suggests DSM does have the option to make masking optional when the county is in low and medium risk, but make masking mandatory if the county moves into the high risk category
- g. John Eskew: wonders if DSM has been following BLP all along
 - i. Jodie Borgia: DSM has not necessarily followed BLP, but have followed Deschutes County as most mandates have come down from state level: for example, DSM does not have the same ventilation system as BLP, so HEPA equipped air filters have been placed in the classrooms to achieve similar results
- h. Kevin McKennon: wonders if Jodie Borgia feels comfortable with writing the new procedures and if she would feel supported without the board voting on this
 - i. Jodie Borgia: yes; the biggest priority is the health and safety of the staff and students; more than happy to write the new procedures with the support of the board
 - ii. Kevin McKennon: suggests the board put out a statement of support to the community

- i. John Eskew: would like to make sure we are respecting everyone who has attended the meeting and not just leaving the decision up in the air as we have voted on Covid policies in the past
 - i. Jodie Borgia: the board has approved Covid safety plans in the past and will need to approve a new plan in April; all the changes will be from Ready Schools, Safe Learners guidance plus whatever is decided tonight
- j. Julia Sutter: we have followed BLP decisions about when to come back to school during Covid, etc, and thinks that a vote is in order since the masking issue was brought to the community
 - i. Jodie Borgia: BLP has not brought it to their board for a vote
 - ii. Julia Sutter: thinks it is different for DSM since we could choose to follow BLP or not
- k. Daisy Sexton: does not feel strongly about whether the board votes or not; is in favor of aligning with the district and moving to optional masking
- l. David Trexler: supports optional masking and putting out a statement to the community whether the board votes or not; thinks the nuances that Jodie Borgia has to deal with are complicated, but a clear statement about masking is required
- m. John Eskew: thinks we can move forward with optional masking since there is no vote required to do so
- n. Daisy Sexton: thinks if Jessica Loukonen or Jodie Borgia receive feedback around the board needing to vote, we could do so then
 - i. Jessica Loukonen: the board has a meeting scheduled for next week and can reassess then if needed
- o. Jodie Borgia: would like an email communicating all of this to the parents to be from both herself and the board
 - i. Daisy Sexton: would like for the communication to reiterate that we all need to move forward with kindness and support

Jessica Loukonen: expresses thanks to the families for attending the meeting and for their comments.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 6:24pm.

Recorded by: Cara Nowak

Minutes approved at 3/16/2022 Board Meeting

