

LT parents talk mask mandate

BY KEVIN MCCONLOGUE PRESS EXAMINER Wednesday, January 12, 2022

S o m e Lackawanna Trail parents are asking the school board to consider reinstating a mask mandate for the district.

At a virtual work session meeting on Monday night, a group of parents said they think their students would be much safer if the district once again required masks inside all school buildings. Last month, the board voted 5-4 to make masks optional for students and employees.

Colin Dempsey, a parent of two Trail Elementary students, said he has been watching the district’s COV- ID-19 dashboard and that it is no coincidence the uptick in cases started when the mask mandate was lifted. “

Since the beginning of December, the alerts for students and staff testing positive has been nonstop. That happens to be the same time we stopped requiring masks” Dempsey said. “We need to follow the science and have everyone masked as long as the surge is continuing in our area.”

Elementary school teacher Gail Franko gave an emotional plea to the board to require masks again. Franko said her father recently passed away from a non- COVID illness and she has seen firsthand the strain hospitals are currently in.

“It is awful what doctors and nurses are having to do right now,” Franko said. “People are struggling to find proper care because COVID is pushing the hospitals to the brink. My students have never complained about having to wear a mask. It’s time we put the interests of others first and protect each other.”

Board member Joe Ross who voted against the mask optional policy said he fully agrees with all of the parents’ statements.

“I think we’re being irresponsible,” Ross said. “I know I’m in the minority on this board, but I don’t think we’re following the science and we’re only hurting ourselves. I think it’s shameful.”

Members of administration said they have been working with the board on possible updates to the protocols. High School principal Mark Murphy asked the board to consider a test-to stay program which is being implemented in some other school districts. In this program, kids who are identified as close contacts of a positive COVID-19 case will have the opportunity to be tested at school. If the test comes back negative, the student can stay in school without having to miss any time. Close contacts would be tested every other day for five days which is following CDC guidelines. Murphy also said a universal masking policy would keep a lot more kids in school without having to quarantine. “At the end of December, there were close to 120 high school students in quarantine,”

Murphy said. “If a lot of those students had been wearing a mask, they would not have had to quarantine according to the current guidelines.”

Board president Kevin Mulhern said the board will continue to work with the administration on possible revisions to the health and safety plan and continue to monitor the number of cases inside the schools.

Board member David Thorne announced he will be resigning from the board at the end of January. He said he will be stepping down due to personal and family reasons and will formally resign at next week’s regular board meeting.

Business manager Keith Glynn announced the district has officially received the $500,000 Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program grant announced last month that will be used for construction of an educational field house on the campus of the high school. District leaders and board members will now create a business plan and put services out to bid for construction. Work on the field house hopes to begin in the spring.

At next week’s regular meeting, the board will vote to approve: ■ a wastewater treatment plant operation contract with Hester Wastewater Services LLC for $1,900/month beginning Feb. 1.

■ the purchase of a dishwasher system for the high school cafeteria from Rice’s Food Service at a cost of $27,220.62.

■ the appointments of Micha Schneider and Seamus Nichols, bus drivers with Nichols Bus; and Jessica Bentley, assistant softball coach for the 2021-22 season.

■ the resignations of Dan Demora, stagecraft director; and Brink Powell, dramatics director. The Lackawanna Trail School Board will next meet for its regular meeting on Monday, Jan. 17, at 7:30 p.m. The Zoom link will be posted at www.ltsd.org.