

## **Health & Safety Steering Committee Meeting Notes - January 26, 2022**

Read full meeting agenda and member list [here](#).

### **PUSD COVID Update:**

- Superintendent Booker opened the meeting thanking PUSD staff for everything they have done in an effort to keep schools open during the current surge. It has been an 'All Hands on Deck' approach and while the District is not out of the woods yet, it is comforting to know all are on the same page about keeping students safe and on campus.
- PUSD students now report 98% fully vaccinated and counting. Very proud of the community and its commitment to safe schools.
- The PUSD Board will discuss a [revised student vaccination policy](#) at its meeting this evening. Knew it would be an uphill battle when the policy was approved but still believe it was the right thing to do. With the District's high vaccination rate and proposed legislation in Sacramento to add COVID to the list of required vaccinations, it is now recommended to remove the requirement. Goal was to keep students safe and in school. Believe that goal has been achieved.
- Board will also discuss, and potentially approve, a [Resolution](#) thanking the Piedmont community for its partnership in student COVID vaccinations and calling on the state to quickly add COVID to the list of mandatory vaccinations for school enrollment. If approved, the Resolution will be sent to Sacramento and the County Office of Education.
- A new Staff FAQ regarding COVID testing and safety is under development and will be presented to the Committee for review at a future meeting.

### **Discussion Topics:**

Outdoor Masking - The outdoor requirement for secondary students was reinstated on January 18th with a promise to reevaluate at today's meeting. Discussion points and opinions shared included:

- The PUSD Board and District administration are receiving significant communication from the community on both sides of the issue.
- Reminder to the community that the District has no authority over indoor mask requirements - those are set by the state and county.
- Numbers indicate we are about a week past the peak of the Omicron surge, but it will continue for another 2-3 weeks. There is still significant infection happening - nearly as much to come as up to this point. Boosters provide significantly greater protection than just two shots (36% efficacy with two shots, 77% with a booster). Still not the time to peel back on protective measures.

- There is a petition being circulated by a pair of local physicians that has been the basis of much of the community's communication with the Board advocating lifting the mask requirement. This petition reflects the doctors' opinions and not those of UCSF, or local government.
- COVID/Omicron remain very real in our County on a day-to-day basis. Now at 230/100,000 cases.
- All staff and patients tested at a local hospital showed huge positivity rate shifts from 2% six weeks ago to >30% last week. Rates are now starting to come down, but still are high.
- Regardless of any metric the Committee settles on, COVID will still be here in 2-3 weeks.
- These mandates are having an impact on students. Students are a low-risk group. There isn't a zero-risk solution here. Continuing current requirements without considering the cost is not good policy. What is it we're accomplishing?
- Mandates were established as ways to keep schools open based on what we knew at the time. Made best decisions possible with the information at hand. Here now asking for feedback based on what we know today.
- We want to recognize and respect the positions of families who oppose masking, but must also consider the conditions we are currently under.
- Not discounting the psychological component to wearing masks, but shouldn't take them off based on the opinions of vocal community members.
- We should always return to the touchstone of keeping kids safe. How is PUSD compared to other districts in terms of number of in-person days lost?
- Need to recognize vaccinated students are not in mortal danger. It's the number of positive cases that we're trying to address. Must develop a nuanced approach to being outdoors. Running a mile on the track in gym class and recess are not the same thing. Masking has a value and must be an option. Close contact outside (within 6 feet for 15 minutes) are still significant risks for transmission according to both state and local public health guidelines. If kids can't distance outside, then there is real risk for transmission.
- Masks will need to stay on for kids who had COVID and returned to school before 10 days. Making sure this occurs for these students is a challenge for staff.
- An optional masking policy would put a lot of pressure on staff to know who is unvaccinated, where they can be and for how long.
- CDPH avoided the mask-optional choice as to not separate students obviously based on vaccination status. Important to recognize mask-optional creates a dynamic where students who are recently positive or unvaccinated, or who want to keep a mask on for other reasons like high risk household members, are

singled out. This can create new psychological harms for students, as much as we fear the psychological impact of kids wearing masks all day.

- Reality is social distancing does not exist in our schools. State guidelines still say unvaccinated students have to be masked when in group settings. How does staff handle these students while infection rates are high?
- Why create metrics that don't exist at a state or national level? Better to set a date to align with state guidelines.
- Return to the previous metric, but communicate that this number can change as conditions change and more information becomes available.
- The District has had 275 cases over the past month. That represents about 10% of our total population (students + staff). We used to panic over far less. Piedmont is a unique community and if case numbers return to where they were, requirements should become less rigid.
- Whatever the decision, needs to be clearly communicated that if you send your student to school unmasked, transmission is possible.
- The community shouldn't be forcing a metric to be decided on. Conditions can be reevaluated in 2-3 weeks as the surge continues to weaken.
- There is no need to reevaluate in 2-3 weeks. Can assume cases will be down in that period of time.
- Is this additional layer of protection even necessary when Piedmont's numbers are much better than the surrounding area?

Consensus of the group is to continue outdoor mask requirements as currently mandated. PUSD Board of Education may discuss the issue this evening and take action at a future date. Committee will have further discussion at its next meeting.

#### PCR Testing

- Do not find PCR testing reliable as an individual can remain PCR-positive for a long period of time. Can the District pivot toward rapid-antigen surveillance testing?
- Invasive tests should be on an 'opt-in' basis rather than 'opt-out'.

Superintendent Booker, District Nurses and Health Clerks will revisit and adjust FAQ.

#### Role of Committee

- Request for Superintendent Booker to clarify the role of the Health & Safety Steering Committee to the community. Seems to be an opinion that the Committee is some sort of secret cabal making unilateral decisions. The Committee is here to support the District - not control it. Advice is given to the

Superintendent and Board of Education to do what they feel is in the best interests of students.

**Next meeting - Wednesday, February 16th, 8:30am**