

**Meeting of the Gentry Board of Education
District #19
Minutes of Board of Education**

Meeting	Type	Location	Time	Date
No 3	Special	GHS/GMS Cafeteria	6:00 p.m.	August 13, 2021

Present

David Williamson – President
Randall Bolinger - Vice President
Melissa Holland – Secretary
Gary Dunlap- Member
Jon Holt – Member
John Skaggs - Member

Absent

Jim Barnes – Member

Call to Order

The August 13, 2021, Special meeting, was called to order at 6:05 pm by Board President, David Williamson, with 6 members present. Mr. Barnes was out of town and unable to attend. The local press was notified but unable to attend.

Community members present included but may not have been limited to the following:

- Melissa Pyburn
- Terri Hughes
- Ron Hughes
- Becca Newberry
- Jamie Butler
- Kelli Matthews
- Candi Tomlinson
- Wes Renfroe
- Meredith Renfroe
- Leslie Morgan
- Paul Hamm
- Sam Kutz
- Ryan Womack
- Janette Fincher
- Jacob Faught
- Brent Still
- Tahmara Coones
- Beth Spivey

It was noted at the beginning of the meeting that the first 15 people signed up to speak in support of mandatory masking and 15 against a mandated mask policy could speak when the board called on them. They were to be given 3 minutes per person maximum. Mr. Williamson explained the rules for speaking and encouraged respect.

Moment of Silence

Observed

Survey Results:

Ms. Metz shared the results of the survey that had been sent to parents.

34% were in favor of a mask mandate based on 219 respondents. 422 respondents, 66% of the total responding, said they were not in support of mandated masking.

Current enrollment is 1545 K-12.

Four people were properly recognized from the sign-in sheet, to speak for a mask mandate. They were:

- Mr. Ryan Womack
- Ms. Janette Fincher
- Mr. Jacob Faught
- Mr. Brent Still

Five people signed up to speak against mandated masking and were recognized:

1. Wes Renfroe
2. Sam Kutz
3. Leslie Morgan
4. Melissa Pyburn
5. Paul Hamm

The Board did allow others to ask questions or speak from the floor when recognized. The discussion included but may not have been limited to the following points:

- Masks are the right thing to do to make everyone feel safe.
- Belief that there is no science in support of masks.
- Masks limit socialization and increase anxiety in some children.
- Students are leaving school before graduation in favor of GED because they cannot take the stress of masks and quarantines anymore.
- Mental health is a concern for children who are sensitive to wearing the mask all day or who are afraid of breaking distancing rules and mask wearing protocols.
- Children under 12 cannot be vaccinated and therefore need the protection of a mask mandate.

- Masks are a show and do no real good as students touch them and contaminate them almost immediately.
- Masks are unhealthy (sweaty, dirty, etc.)
- Parents want to make the choice for their child
- There is support for those who want to mask but also a request to support those who feel the mental harm to their child in a mask is significant as well.
- Pandemic records are being broken currently and it's important to do everything we can to try and limit the spread. Masks are the best way to do that.

Ms. Metz explained information sent home regarding quarantine. She also shared other precautions in place for a safer environment for students which included:

- Plexiglass table dividers for cafeteria tables
- Increased Cleaning/Disinfecting measures through out the day and evening shifts
- Water bottle fillers

Calculated quarantined statistics from last year, by building were reviewed by Ms. Metz. Mr. Barrett also helped field questions concerning these statistics.

Parents asked questions about the following:

- multiple quarantines/clarification on ADH Quarantine Guidelines.

Mr. Barrett shared from the following:

- August 10, 2021 new state guidance based on ADH Guidelines:
https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Files/REVISED_Copy_of_FINAL_2021-22_Guidance_for_Schools_20210810111300.pdf

Mr. Williamson announced that he was closing comments from the floor.

David Williamson recommended leaving the existing policy in place and evaluating weekly for possible need to change. John Skaggs seconded.

Ms. Holland addressed the Board and the audience. She stated that this was not a decision she would make lightly. She said that she had agonized over it all week. She said that she had not eaten or slept well worried about the weight of the decision. She said that she had received e-mails asking her how she would feel when a child died if she made a bad decision. She told the crowd that there was no way for the Board to please everyone or ensure they were protecting everyone. She asked Mr. Williamson if the minutes could reflect her encouragement that masks be used even though it might not be mandated. Others agreed with encouraging safety measures without mandating them.

Mr. Skaggs asked if the Board had the authority to also choose to close school at a certain percentage of absences like what has been done for flu in the past. Ms. Metz said it was not within their authority currently to set levels to close school.

Melissa Holland said “I highly recommend, even if it is not a mandate, we encourage and teach our kids to wash and distance and mask if possible. I would like to see this as a monthly agenda item for discussion. Ms. Metz agreed to make the topic a regular agenda item for the Board.

The vote carried 6-0.

Round table -

John Skaggs said he hated having the responsibility of making this decision without the authority to regulate other aspects of it. “I don’t like partial authority in this matter.” He said that approximately 60,000 hours of instruction was lost last year. Mr. Skaggs said, “We have something new that we don’t know much about and that’s stressful, but disease has been around a long time.” He said “I believe in God, but we also trust doctors and I do believe in the right to choose as parents for our own children. Suicide is the number two cause of death for children in America and we do not meet to mandate suicide prevention measures. I hope we can work together as school and community through this.”

Melissa Holland said, “When I was thinking on this all week, I asked myself “How would I feel if a child was in the hospital because of my choice?” The same is true in reverse for a child who might kill himself. All forms of health are important. I was elected to make the best decisions I could for students and the District, and I am trying to do just that. I hope for grace, kindness, cooperation, and community unity regardless of what side of the issue we are on.”

Jon Holt thanked parents and staff for coming and having the courage to stand up and share their beliefs. He noted he respected the passion on both sides. He said, “We are all in the same boat and we hear you and appreciate input.”

Gary Dunlap- echoed the other comments and said “It’s a tough decision. Not everyone will be happy with the choice we made.”

Randall Bolinger- agreed saying, “It should not have been passed down to this level, but it was, and we have to do what we feel is best based on the information we have”

David Williamson – Agreed with all comments

Adjourn

Randall Bolinger moved to adjourn at 7:01 pm and Gary Dunlap seconded, the vote carried 6-0.