

Re: **!!! Masking Policy for Virginia Beach City Public Schools !!!**

'Melinda J. Rogers' via VBCPSSchoolBoard <vbcpschoolboard@googlegroups.com>

Wed 7/28/2021 11:28 AM

To: Jennifer Franklin <Jennifer.Franklin@VBCPSBoard.com>

Cc: Aaron C. Spence <Aaron.Spence@vbschools.com>; vbcpschoolboard@googlegroups.com
<vbcpschoolboard@googlegroups.com>

Ms. Franklin:

Thank you so much for your prompt response. It is much appreciated. I wanted to clarify a few things:

2.) If parents are allowed to choose to mask or not for their students, will staff be given the same choice regardless of vaccination status? I fully believe in choice, but if you are an employee and have chosen to not be vaccinated due to personal reasons then I think that you should be required to wear a mask. I am open to hearing feedback on this but that is my initial reaction since the vaccination has been available to all employees.

I am became fully vaccinated in February and received my first dose on January 27, 2021. However, as you are also aware, the vaccines are still being studied before full FDA approval will be given, and the most recent studies out of Israel are stating that the efficacy of the vaccines declines as time moves forward. The people who were given the vaccine first are showing less protection than those that were given the vaccine last. Therefore, many of the staff who were in line on January 27, 2021, are less protected now than they were last spring. I find that to be a problematic for the coming school year. Staff who were vaccinated will become more susceptible to the Delta variant and can inadvertently infect everyone around them should they be unmasked.

4.) If parents have the right to choose whether or not their child wears a mask, will parents also have the right to choose whether or not their child is placed in a classroom of only masked students? What about the staff? Will they get a choice as to whether or not they want to teach masked or unmasked students? I would actually love to have the opportunity to put them into masked/unmasked classrooms so that those who prefer that choice would feel comfortable being in that particular setting, I just don't know it's feasible for scheduling to accommodate that.

How will that look in the secondary schools? Students move more freely about the buildings and change classes every bell. Most schedules are already in place, which is why students are asked to pick their classes in the spring for the next school year. How is it equitable for parents who want students masked to only allow fully masked or fully unmasked classes at the elementary level only because of scheduling conflicts? By giving the choice to parents who want their children unmasked means you are giving no choices to parents who do want their children's environment to be as safe as possible. Do you not think that opening a health and safety mitigation to "parent choice" is opening the door for other parents to make other choices to ensure the safety of their children?

5.) Will we still need to use glass partitions in our classrooms if we are forgoing masking? What about shared supplies? Will the students be able to work in small groups or will they need to be completely separated because they will be unmasked? I still think that we use the clear partitions (one of the reasons that I want the mask optional choice is because I do believe that the mask impairs speech therapy/education, a clear partition would not impact that) and other mitigation options as much as possible. No, we still should not be sharing supplies. If we are adhering to the 3 feet rule, then they should still be distanced 3 feet at all times.

The assumption regarding safety glass and masking is inaccurate. As you know, I teach in a prekindergarten classroom. However, last year half of my students were students that had IEPs for speech therapy. The speech therapist spent almost half of her therapy time each week with my students. One of the main goals in my classroom is to have the students talk with each other and practice the communication skills they gain in their time with our speech therapist. They are with her for 15-30 minute sessions per day but are with me the rest of the time. I work very closely with the speech therapist regarding how to teach my entire class letter sounds that align with what she is teaching my students in therapy. I have learned all her hand signals she has for letter sounds and teach them to all my students each year to promote proper speech. I have consulted our speech therapist on my teaching strategies for small groups and even regarding songs that students should be hearing to properly pronounce each letter sound. When students would communicate in my classroom, they used their words and their hand signals at time to effectively communicate with masks on. Last year, the glass partitions completely stunted the student's ability to communicate with each other. Students saw the glass partition as a wall and did not communicate with the person on the other side of the partition, even though that was the person sitting right across from them. Furthermore, the thickness of the glass prevented the students from properly hearing each other in conversation without shouting, which they knew was not a proper classroom voice volume. Therefore, most students simply gave up. Students were most capable of conversation during outdoor play, even with masks on. However, that is only 40 minutes of our program and does not give students enough opportunity to communicate.

Furthermore, masks are portable and glass partitions are not. Teachers were told that the goal of this coming school year was to allow the students to be more independent than they were last school year. How does eliminating masks and keeping partitions further that goal? How will students be able to freely move about the classroom if they are maskless? Should partitions be in place of masks, students will then be tied to the desks that hold the partitions. This is totally inappropriate for prekindergarten and kindergarten students. How will students be able to have centers with other students if they must be next to their glass partition? How will we have students move about the hallways if they will be required to maintain 3 feet of distance without a mask? Teachers will be unable to have eyes on every student in the hallway if they are maskless and three feet apart. Is this what is intended? What about dismissing students for recess? Will the teacher have to dismiss students one at a time to maintain proper distancing? How is the teacher supposed to be with both the students in the classroom and the students outside if they must always maintain three feet?

Last, students who are being seen for speech can and have asked for a mask exemption for speech services. During speech, students are in very small groups of 4 or less and can be seen on a one-to-one basis. However, those ratios are impossible in a classroom setting. Having a mask exemption for speech services makes much more sense to give to students when needed instead of just removing masks all together.

6.) Will we still be expected to clean our classrooms using the spray provided by the division last year? How much cleaning will be expected of us if we no longer will be given Mondays to clean and prepare our classrooms and we will no longer be masking? I actually was not against the asynchronous Mondays but what did you do the rest of the week when kids came back F2F? I assume that you were cleaning throughout the day and daily? Dr. Spence, what was the expectation T-F last year when the teachers came back F2F? Yes, I would like to see cleaning continue to remain in place and I hear that the custodial staff has been doing a great job with their efforts.

I appreciate that you've asked these questions. During the school week, I did clean my classroom repeatedly- all during my scheduled planning time. I did not have any time at all to plan for the week because of the amount of cleaning that needed to happen in my classroom. My students eat breakfast

and snack in my room. Not only did the students need the crumbs and spills wiped up, but they also regularly got the glass partitions dirty, which needed to be cleaned without cleaner and only with soap and water. As you can imagine, it was quite the ordeal trying to disinfect desks with cleaning solution but then cleaning the glass partition with something totally different. We also had to provide students with materials for centers. I went out and purchased (with my own money) plastic boxes for students to have at their desk that housed manipulatives. Each week, those boxes had to be cleaned and disinfected. On Friday evenings, my assistant and myself stayed late after school to use the sink to wash and disinfect all the boxes and manipulatives. There were twenty boxes, so it took quite some time. Then, on Mondays we used the time to plan for the week, make copies, clean the desks and glass partitions, attend professional development, meet with students in small groups, and put all the cleaned boxes we used for centers back in the proper boxes to be used again the following week. We also spent time cleaning each of the student's cubby boxes to keep them organized for students each week. Normally, we would have the students organize their own items, however because there were no shared items, it was difficult to get to every student every week to teach them organizational skills, so we wound up having to bear some of the burden ourselves. All of this cleaning was on top of what the custodial staff was doing. This was necessary since there were many weeks that our custodial staff was not fully staffed in our building, as was the case in many buildings in the division. Will the division be fully staffed this year? We also used Mondays to meet with the speech teacher as well as attend IEP meetings for the students in my classroom.

Now that we will be in person Monday-Friday this upcoming school year, and you are proposing to keep the glass partitions instead of wearing masks, when will extra time be given to teachers that have to use their planning time to clean said glass partitions? Also, not all classrooms were equipped with glass partitions, especially for desks that were stand alone. Does the division intend to spend more money on these partitions? Also, we found that the adhesive we were given with the glass partitions did not hold up for the entire school year. In some cases, it only lasted a few weeks. We were told that there was no more adhesive available when we asked for more. Should glass partitions be the safety mitigation instead of masks, will more adhesive be provided by the division to keep them secure on the desks all year? Last, I had several students cut themselves on the glass partitions during the school year. How will we ensure that this does not keep happening to our students?

Again, thank you for your feedback and questions. I think it's important to understand the concerns on both sides. I just personally think that if we can start alleviating one mitigation strategy that can impair learning (and it clearly states on the mask boxes that they don't prevent disease AND the kids are able to run around now without masks outside of school so I'm not sure that masking in school will make a difference at this point), that we should strive to start the road back to normalcy. Let's continue to use the other mitigation efforts and determine if that is enough to continue to keep the numbers down. If we see them not working, then we can always re-evaluate but let's at least try to bring a piece of normal life in the classroom back to these kids. If you read this far, thank you for listening to my point of view on this.

While I disagree with your assessment on masking, I do agree that we need to get back to some normalcy. This is why I am against using the glass partitions in the classroom and in favor of using masks. The children do not need another year being tied to their desks, unable to move about the classroom independently and unable to work cooperatively. If we truly want to see normalcy, we need to be dedicated to providing that normalcy with safety mitigations in place. The most logical choice would be to keep the safety mitigation in place that is portable for the students, that can be used anywhere, and can be removed when deemed necessary. That does not describe the glass partitions. It describes masks.

Thank you.

Melinda Rogers

Prekindergarten Teacher

Three Oaks Elementary School

2201 Elson Green Avenue

Virginia Beach, Va 23456

Phone: (757) 648-3960

"Play gives children a chance to practice what they are learning."- Fred Rogers

From: Jennifer Franklin <Jennifer.Franklin@VBCPSBoard.com>

Sent: Wednesday, July 28, 2021 7:36 AM

To: Melinda J. Rogers <Melinda.Rogers@vbschools.com>; Aaron C. Spence <Aaron.Spence@vbschools.com>

Subject: RE: !!! Masking Policy for Virginia Beach City Public Schools !!!

Ms. Rogers, Thank you for your input and I would like to respond since I did vote in favor of lifting the masking mandate in lieu of other mandates being in place:

- 1.) What health and safety mitigations will you have in place in lieu of masking, if any? If the plan is to forgo health and safety mitigations, what are the parameters in place that would dictate a school closure, if any? If a school is closed due to unmitigated infection, how many days/weeks before the school could re-open again? Who would be the person/people making those decisions? As a proclaimed germophobe myself, I have been doing lots of mitigations even before COVID as I was a single Mom for many years and couldn't take the chance of getting sick and not being able to work. I know that hand washing actually works, as well as maintaining social distancing when possible (3 feet will still be preferred within the schools) and the other mitigations outside masking will be in place. I do think that should the numbers go back up and the Governor feels like masking should be in place, that we will go back to having that mitigation also in place. We will continue to watch the numbers as we did last year. I believe that the Dr. Spence and the board would make the decision regarding re-opening.
- 2.) Since the goal is to keep students in school, it is likely that 3 feet of distance between students will be unfeasible given our large student population. As you know, 40% of our students last year were virtual, which made more room in face-to-face classrooms. What is the plan to keep students separated if there is no masking in place and there is not enough space to keep students apart? Dr. Robertson mentioned that the 3 feet rule will be instituted as much as possible. I believe Dr. Spence is better suited to answer this question.
- 2.) If parents are allowed to choose to mask or not for their students, will staff be given the same choice regardless of vaccination status? I fully believe in choice, but if you are an employee and have chosen to not be vaccinated due to personal reasons then I think that you should be required to wear a mask. I am open to hearing feedback on this but that is my initial reaction since the vaccination has been available to all employees.

3.) If staff are allowed to choose whether or not to wear a mask, and a classroom teacher becomes positive with the Delta variant of Covid, will parents be notified of the teacher's case? If so, would then the division or the teacher be held responsible for students becoming positive due to exposure by the teacher? If not, would the class be quarantined? What about the specialists coming into contact with that class? The Delta variant is two to three times more contagious than the alpha variant we dealt with last school year (See: <https://virological.org/t/viral-infection-and-transmission-in-a-large-well-traced-outbreak-caused-by-the-delta-sars-cov-2-variant/724>). Again, I think that an unvaccinated teacher should continue wearing a mask but yes, anytime there is a potential exposure there should be notification to those potentially impacted by that. If we have parents sign a mask waiver then I don't believe that the division or its employees would hold responsibility. The class could be potentially quarantined.

4.) If parents have the right to choose whether or not their child wears a mask, will parents also have the right to choose whether or not their child is placed in a classroom of only masked students? What about the staff? Will they get a choice as to whether or not they want to teach masked or unmasked students? I would actually love to have the opportunity to put them into masked/unmasked classrooms so that those who prefer that choice would feel comfortable being in that particular setting, I just don't know it's feasible for scheduling to accommodate that.

5.) Will we still need to use glass partitions in our classrooms if we are forgoing masking? What about shared supplies? Will the students be able to work in small groups or will they need to be completely separated because they will be unmasked? I still think that we use the clear partitions (one of the reasons that I want the mask optional choice is because I do believe that the mask impairs speech therapy/education, a clear partition would not impact that) and other mitigation options as much as possible. No, we still should not be sharing supplies. If we are adhering to the 3 feet rule, then they should still be distanced 3 feet at all times.

6.) Will we still be expected to clean our classrooms using the spray provided by the division last year? How much cleaning will be expected of us if we no longer will be given Mondays to clean and prepare our classrooms and we will no longer be masking? I actually was not against the asynchronous Mondays but what did you do the rest of the week when kids came back F2F? I assume that you were cleaning throughout the day and daily? Dr. Spence, what was the expectation T-F last year when the teachers came back F2F? Yes, I would like to see cleaning continue to remain in place and I hear that the custodial staff has been doing a great job with their efforts.

Again, thank you for your feedback and questions. I think it's important to understand the concerns on both sides. I just personally think that if we can start alleviating one mitigation strategy that can impair learning (and it clearly states on the mask boxes that they don't prevent disease AND the kids are able to run around now without masks outside of school so I'm not sure that masking in school will make a difference at this point), that we should strive to start the road back to normalcy. Let's continue to use the other mitigation efforts and determine if that is enough to continue to keep the numbers down. If we see them not working, then we can always re-evaluate but let's at least try to bring a piece of normal life in the classroom back to these kids. If you read this far, thank you for listening to my point of view on this.

From: 'Melinda J. Rogers' via VBCPSSchoolBoard <vbcpsschoolboard@googlegroups.com>

Sent: Tuesday, July 27, 2021 10:25 PM

To: Aaron C. Spence <Aaron.Spence@vbschools.com>; vbcpsschoolboard@googlegroups.com

Subject: !!! Masking Policy for Virginia Beach City Public Schools !!!

Dear Dr. Spence and Board Members:

As you are aware, I have spoken during public comment regarding the upcoming decision about the division's masking policy. The CDC has now extended its masking guidance for all K-12 students regardless of vaccine status.

Having spent last year as an in-person teacher, I am aware of the health and safety mitigations that were in place inside classrooms in the division. I was there when health and safety officers stopped by to check on how our mitigations were being handled in the building. I was implementing the health and safety mitigations within my own classroom. Should the masking mandate remain in place, I understand what would be expected of me and of my students to keep us as safe as possible in the classroom.

A few parents from our district as well as from other school districts presented the case to have the masking mandate lifted in favor of "parent choice". Some board members were in support of this measure. Before I present any material to my students, I am expected to be prepared with a solid plan to execute my lesson and be prepared to answer any questions my students may have. I would expect that board members who are supporting this measure also have formulated a plan should their proposed measure pass, they have thought through scenarios, and can answer some basic question. Therefore, I am directing these questions at the board members who are supporting the parent choice measure:

- 1.) What health and safety mitigations will you have in place in lieu of masking, if any? If the plan is to forgo health and safety mitigations, what are the parameters in place that would dictate a school closure, if any? If a school is closed due to unmitigated infection, how many days/weeks before the school could re-open again? Who would be the person/people making those decisions?
- 2.) Since the goal is to keep students in school, it is likely that 3 feet of distance between students will be unfeasible given our large student population. As you know, 40% of our students last year were virtual, which made more room in face-to-face classrooms. What is the plan to keep students separated if there is no masking in place and there is not enough space to keep students apart?
- 2.) If parents are allowed to choose to mask or not for their students, will staff be given the same choice regardless of vaccination status?
- 3.) If staff are allowed to choose whether or not to wear a mask, and a classroom teacher becomes positive with the Delta variant of Covid, will parents be notified of the teacher's case? If so, would then the division or the teacher be held responsible for students becoming positive due to exposure by the teacher? If not, would the class be quarantined? What about the specialists coming into contact with that class? The Delta variant is two to three times more contagious than the alpha variant we dealt with last school year (See: <https://virological.org/t/viral-infection-and-transmission-in-a-large-well-traced-outbreak-caused-by-the-delta-sars-cov-2-variant/724>).
- 4.) If parents have the right to choose whether or not their child wears a mask, will parents also have the right to choose whether or not their child is placed in a classroom of only masked students? What about the staff? Will they get a choice as to whether or not they want to teach masked or unmasked students?

5.) Will we still need to use glass partitions in our classrooms if we are forgoing masking? What about shared supplies? Will the students be able to work in small groups or will they need to be completely separated because they will be unmasked?

6.) Will we still be expected to clean our classrooms using the spray provided by the division last year? How much cleaning will be expected of us if we no longer will be given Mondays to clean and prepare our classrooms and we will no longer be masking?

I appreciate your responses in advance. I have no doubt that these questions will be answered before the August 10th meeting so that I can have some time to make some decisions for myself and my family regarding this upcoming school year.

Thank you for your time.

Melinda Rogers

Prekindergarten Teacher
Three Oaks Elementary School

2201 Elson Green Avenue

Virginia Beach, Va 23456

Phone: (757) 648-3960

"Play gives children a chance to practice what they are learning."- Fred Rogers

--

You received this message because you are subscribed to the Google Groups "VBCPSSchoolBoard" group.

To unsubscribe from this group and stop receiving emails from it, send an email to

vbcpschoolboard+unsubscribe@googlegroups.com.

To view this discussion on the web visit

<https://groups.google.com/d/msgid/vbcpschoolboard/BLAPR22MB2225F3C3C2806F77850BDC8C90E99%40BLAPR22MB2225.namprd22.prod.outlook.com>.

--

You received this message because you are subscribed to the Google Groups "VBCPSSchoolBoard" group.

To unsubscribe from this group and stop receiving emails from it, send an email to

vbcpschoolboard+unsubscribe@googlegroups.com.

To view this discussion on the web visit

<https://groups.google.com/d/msgid/vbcpschoolboard/BLAPR22MB22255374070C319B0842992C90EA9%40BLAPR22MB2225.namprd22.prod.outlook.com>.