

**Perquimans County Board of Education  
Emergency Session – August 31, 2021**

The Perquimans County Board of Education met in emergency session on Tuesday, August 31, 2021, at 5:00 p.m. in the administrative offices of Perquimans County Schools. The purpose of the meeting was to consider the district health protocols. Audio access was available to the public by dialing a telephone number and entering a meeting ID and passcode.

Board Chair Dr. Anne White called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone to the meeting. Arlene Yates led the audience in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag and Amy Spaugh said a prayer.

Board members present: Chair Dr. Anne White (in person), Vice Chair Russell Lassiter (remote), Matt Peeler (remote), Amy Spaugh (in person), Leary Winslow (remote), and Arlene Yates (in person).

**Approval of Agenda**

Upon motion by Arlene Yates and second by Amy Spaugh, the Board voted unanimously to approve the agenda as presented.

**New Business**

**District Health Protocols**

Superintendent Dr. Tanya Turner presented a Power Point presentation on COVID protocols and entertained questions during the presentation. The first slide provided a current map of North Carolina mask mandates. As of now, 94 districts require masks, masks are optional in 19 districts, and two districts partially require masks. Since school began, 41 districts have changed their masking decision from optional to mandatory. Dr. Turner provided an illustration of a school district that began with masks being optional and then changed to masks being required.

Dr. Turner shared a chart that showed the current COVID count in Perquimans County Schools which included 11 student positives, 3 staff positives, 109 student quarantines, 5 staff quarantines, and 18 waiting on results. She shared COVID numbers from three school districts that have required masks since the first day of school—Bertie, Gates, and Washington.

Dr. Turner reminded the Board about the quarantine guidance in the StrongSchools toolkit. Individuals who are fully vaccinated and do not have symptoms do NOT need to quarantine after a close contact. People who have tested positive for COVID-19 within the past three months and recovered and do not have symptoms do NOT have to quarantine. In particular, students who are not fully vaccinated after a close contact in a classroom or other school setting if masks were being worn appropriately and consistently by both the person with COVID-19 and the potentially exposed person do NOT need to quarantine. By having a mask mandate, the number of students who have to quarantine is significantly limited. After contacting legal counsel and talking with the NCHSAA Commissioner, if athletes wears their masks, this point also applies to them. It would limit the number of quarantines depending on the sport and the situation. Contact tracing would have to be done for athletics just as was done last year. Dr. Turner shared a chart from the Interim Guidance for Administrators and Participants of Youth and Amateur Sports Program. The chart grouped the sports by category and ranked the sports that are lower risk to those that are higher risk.

Reasons for requiring masks include:

- Significantly reduces the number of quarantines due to exposures at school

- Limits the number of students participating in remote instruction
- Reduces the amount of time and effort for teachers having to teach face to face and remote students while also managing attendance and two-way communication
- Reduces the hardship on parents due to students having to quarantine and child care needs
- Reduces the time required for contact tracing for nurses and administrative staff
- Reduces the spread of the virus
- Increases the pool of substitutes as some have expressed fear of substituting without a mask requirement
- Athletic teams will reduce the number of games missed due to quarantines on the team

Senate Bill 654 was signed into law on August 30, 2021. This bill requires school boards to vote each month on their pandemic-related mask or face covering policy. The bill also allows schools to shift to remote-only learning if needed because of COVID-19 transmission concerns, provided districts notify the state within 72 hours of making that change.

Following her presentation, Dr. Turner recommended to the Board to revise our COVID mitigation plan from optional to require the wearing of masks for all students, staff, and visitors/spectators of Perquimans County Schools while inside school facilities in order to limit the number of quarantines and spread within the district.

After the presentation, Dr. Turner fielded questions from board members and the audience.

Arlene Yates made a motion to revise our COVID mitigation plan to require the wearing of masks for all students, staff, and visitors/spectators of Perquimans County Schools while inside school facilities in order to limit the number of quarantines and spread within the district. Amy Spaugh seconded the motion. Discussion followed.

Board Member Leary Winslow said the motion should state an expiration date. The Governor has said it has to be addressed every month as well. He stated once we get on the other side of this that parents want to know this is “not a blanket we’re throwing over the school district for the rest of the year. We will follow the data the school district gives us as far as COVID numbers and address this monthly.” Dr. Turner noted that an addition to the motion could say that the mandate will be revisited monthly per Senate Bill 654.

Mr. Peeler noted that the Governor has said the mask wearing will be optional. Mr. Peeler stated “we are saying that mask wearing will be required and we will need four board members to flip that. If we get into gridlock, optional becomes the default. If we approve this recommendation, wearing masks will become the default every month until we get four board members to say we will go back to optional.” Mr. Peeler said he will vote no for this due to this reason.

Dr. Turner stated that Senate Bill 654 states that Boards of Education will revisit the masking requirement each month, so each month she will come with a recommendation based on the metrics of the school system. Then the Board would have the opportunity to vote in support of or against that recommendation.

Dr. White stated she would like to “challenge the assumption that three board members will always vote yes and three will always vote no. The Superintendent’s presentation demonstrates that’s not true. We’re looking at the metrics and letting the metrics determine what direction we go.”

Mr. Winslow stated he did not agree with Dr. White's statement. He said there would have been a spike in the numbers regardless. This had nothing to do with last week in school. This had to do with the week before school started and where people were then. Mr. Winslow stated he agreed with Mr. Peeler. If the expiration date is our board meeting every month, then it should default back to the Governor's decision of optional masks. Then the Board would have to vote to require masks. He said he wants to be very clear before he votes that this expires each month and defaults back to optional so that the Board can look at the metrics and truly revisit it. Mr. Winslow said he wants that option and his constituents want that option.

Russell Lassiter expressed that he agrees with Mr. Peeler's approach which seems Mr. Winslow agrees with as well. Mr. Lassiter said he is all for masking up but he is all for following the recommendation for what the Governor has signed into law that the Board revisit it every month. He said we need to default every month to no masks and then have to vote for masks every month. If the recommendation is worded that way, he said he would vote yes. If not, he will vote no.

Dr. Turner asked if a sentence could be added to the recommendation that says this recommendation will expire at the end of each month and will be voted on according to Senate Bill 654. Mr. Winslow stated that the recommendation should read that it will expire at the end of the month. That way when the Board takes action it will give staff time to prepare and time to get the word out. Mr. Lassiter agreed with Mr. Winslow's statement.

Mrs. Spaugh stated "the Board needs to find a point of trust on this topic. Dr. Turner will be bringing a recommendation to the Board at each meeting. Until I'm given a reason not to believe that will work, I will trust that Dr. Turner will bring her recommendation. As a Board we won't likely go against her recommendation. There may be a chance that the Board doesn't agree on this each month, but nitpicking about on the precise language on this demonstrates that we don't trust each other." She said we can trust Dr. Turner to work with us on this next month.

Arlene Yates stated she agreed with Mrs. Spaugh's comments. She stated the Board needs to think about Dr. Turner's presentation. "COVID is still here and we still need to protect our children. I have people calling me about wanting to protect their children and see them wearing masks. With the numbers shown in the presentation, people are going to wear masks. With SB 654 from the Governor, it says the Board has to reconsider this every month. It will depend on the data the Board receives every month."

The Board heard a comment from a member of the audience, Ms. Gracie Felton. She said she told her child to keep a mask on when the child went back to school. That is her choice because she wants her child to be safe. She trusts that the research has been done. It's not just COVID out there now; there are two other kinds out there now. Everyone has the right to do what they want to do. She is thinking about all children's safety, her child's safety, her safety, her husband's safety, her mother's safety—everyone her child comes in contact with.

Mrs. Yates amended her motion to read as follows:

To revise our COVID mitigation plan to require the wearing of masks for all students, staff, and visitors/spectators of Perquimans County Schools while inside school facilities in order to limit the number of quarantines and spread with the district per the Governor's Order, Senate Bill 654 which requires school boards to vote each month on their pandemic-related mask or face covering policy and allows schools to shift to remote-only learning if needed because of COVID-19 transmission concerns, provided they notify the state within 72 hours of making the change.

Amy Spaugh seconded the amended motion. When asked, Mrs. Yates read the entire motion.

Mr. Winslow said the motion was close, but he wanted it worded a certain way so he can be clear on what he is voting on at the next meeting. Mr. Lassiter said he would like the motion to include that as the Board reviews it each month we will default back to where we are now prior to approving this motion.

Dr. Turner presented a revised recommendation:

To require the wearing of masks for all students, staff, and visitors/spectators of Perquimans County Schools while inside school facilities in order to limit the number of quarantines and spread within the district. This requirement will expire at the end of each month dependent on the Board's decision at each monthly meeting when metrics for the school system are analyzed.

Mrs. Yates made the following motion:

To require the wearing of masks for all students, staff, and visitors/spectators of Perquimans County Schools while inside school facilities in order to limit the number of quarantines and spread within the district. This requirement will expire at the end of each month dependent on the Board's decision at each monthly meeting when metrics for the school system are analyzed.

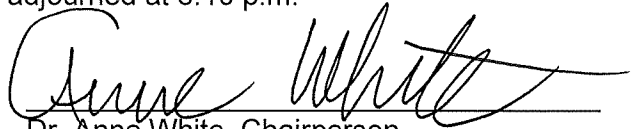
Amy Spaugh seconded the motion and asked if that language came closer to satisfying everyone. Board members voiced their agreement with that language.

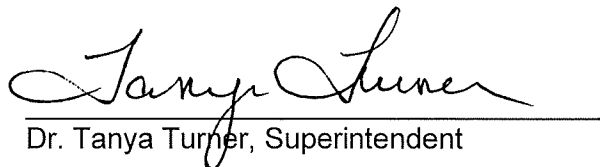
Mr. Peeler asked Dr. Turner when it expires next month, if the Board is at gridlock, what would be the result. Dr. Turner said that it would default back to the Governor's Executive Order where masks are optional unless his Executive Order changes.

Dr. White stated that it had been moved and properly seconded to revise the mitigation plan to require the wearing of masks for all students, staff, and visitors/spectators of Perquimans County Schools while inside school facilities in order to limit the number of quarantines and spread within the district. This requirement will expire at the end of each month dependent on the Board's decision at each monthly meeting when metrics for the school system are analyzed.

The motion was approved 6-0.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:10 p.m.

  
Dr. Anne White, Chairperson

  
Dr. Tanya Turner, Superintendent