

# CLOSTER BOARD OF EDUCATION

*Closter, New Jersey*

MINUTES

SPECIAL MEETING

*Tenakill Middle School*

*March 2, 2022 - 6:00 PM*

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The Board meeting was called to order by Ms. Finkelstein at 6:01 PM

The following Board members were present:

Ms. Fanelli, Ms. Kothari (virtual), Ms. Kwon, Ms. Micera, Dr. Puttannah, Ms. Wagner, Ms. Yeoh,  
Ms. Cross, Ms. Finkelstein

The following Board members were absent:

None

**NEW JERSEY OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT STATEMENT - Read by the President:**

The New Jersey Open Public Meetings Act was enacted to ensure the right of the public to have advance notice of and to attend the meeting of public bodies at which any business affecting their interests is discussed or acted upon. In accordance with the provisions of this Act, the Secretary to the Board of Education has caused notice of this meeting by having the date, time, remote access information, and place thereof, posted at each school building within the district, district website, the Board of Education office, the Office of the Borough Clerk, and transmitted to *The Record* and *Northern Valley Suburbanite* newspapers.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**PUBLIC DISCUSSION ON AGENDA ITEMS**

Moved by Ms. Micera, seconded by Ms. Micera to open the meeting to the public.

*Statements made by individual participants are limited to a duration of three (3) minutes unless otherwise announced at the beginning of the discussion. A maximum of 15 minutes for public input is scheduled as per bylaw 0167. The Board urges large groups to select one person to represent them. The Board reminds those individuals who take the opportunity to speak to please step up, identify themselves by name and address, and to limit their comments to items listed on the agenda.*

*Ms. Blum, 239 Parsells Lane. She expects the Board to make the right decision to abolish the mask mandate. Doing this will restore the academic, social and emotional development the mask mandate so cruelly stopped. She is looking forward to freedom of choice and to move on with our lives on March 7th.*

*Ms. Lotito, 79 Pine Street. She is requesting the Board vote to make masks optional so the parents of Closter can make the best decision for their own children. She asks the Board to make the right decision for all parents.*

*Dr. Warman, 15 Hawthorne Terrace, has been treating covid since 2020, and is familiar with the data. He stated masks are not a good prevention nor do they help stop the spread of the disease. He further stated enough is enough and let the children be free to be children.*

*Mr. Reines, 290 Demarest Lane, thanked the Board for the vigilance and looking after the children over these past two (2) years. We are in a better place now and should feel comfortable to have masks optional.*

*Mr. Villanueva read to the Board and the public comments received via email:*

*Ms. Cuevas, 69 Poplar Street, is in support of the mask optional, allowing families to make the decision for their children to wear a mask or not.*

*Ms. Hwang, 21 Brodil Court, is requesting the mask mandate remain until the vaccinations are high and the FDA approves vaccination for children younger than 5.*

*Ms. Bash, 38 Westervelt Avenue, is requesting the mask mandate to remain since the virus is still here and new variants may emerge. If we do lift the mask mandate, she stated that the Board has an obligation to give parents sufficient notice and a reasonable deadline in order to give parents a timely opportunity to fully vaccinate their children, if they decide.*

*Mr. Wong, 32 Halsey Lane, is in favor of removing the mask mandate in schools as per revised CDC guidelines.*

*Ms. Reduce, 9 Laurence Court, is in favor of the mask mandate. She feels students can be safe without a mask and the mask is more of a detriment, especially at this critical level of education.*

*Ms. Chung, 147 Closter Dock Road, believes it is still too soon to remove the masks in school due to the low vaccination rates.*

*Ms. Messinger, 24 Yale Place, is requesting the Board to vote yes to lifting the mask mandate in school and allowing for personal choice to wear a mask in school if they chose.*

*Mr & Mrs. Cutri, 196 High Street, are requesting to allow parents to make the decision to allow their children to wear a mask in school. They encourage the Board of Education to be pragmatic and not idealistic when coming to a final decision.*

*Ms. Avizov, 17 Buzzoni Dr, is requesting the Board of Education, school staff and fellow parents to be respectful towards adults and children who continue to mask.*

Moved by Ms. Micera, seconded by Ms. Kwon to resume the regular order of business.

## **BOARD OPERATIONS**

Moved by Dr. Puttannah, seconded by Ms. Kwon to approve Motion A.

*Ms. Finkelstein gave some background information to the public. There have been updated guidelines from the CDC along with references from the Department of Health on how schools should handle mask optional policies.*

*Ms. Kwon inquired regarding times when we would implement periods of elevated community transmission to put masks on. What markers would we use to decide this? Mr. McHale responded that the NJ Department of Health and Dr. Persichilli held a meeting with Superintendents and other school leaders regarding masking and other guidelines. During the meeting, it was discussed that if we were to move to very high transmission which is red, we would remask. Mr. McHale is hopeful that it does not happen, since cases are dropping.*

*Ms. Yeoh asked to clarify if we are in orange or high will that require us to mask or will it need to be in the red which is very high. Mr. McHale stated that if we were in red it would be a decision the Board would need to make with the consultation of the Department of Health. This also depends on the rate of community transmission.*

*Ms. Yeoh shared her concerns on the low vaccination rate in both schools. With any covid cases/outbreak, more students will require quarantine which means less kids in school. The goal is to keep the schools open and keep the kids in schools.*

*Ms. Finkelstein reminded everyone that mask shaming by any students or staff member will not be tolerated. If there are any incidents it will be considered a Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying Violation.*

*Ms. Wagner asked who will need to quarantine and who does not. Mr. McHale stated anyone who is within three (3) feet is vaccinated and unmasked or unvaccinated and unmasked would need to be quarantined. These guidelines have not changed.*

*Dr Puttannah asked if the travel quarantine voted at the last meeting had changed. Mr. McHale said that has not changed.*

*Ms. Finkelstein shared that the Closter Education Association does not have an official position regarding the mask mandate. The CEA conducted a poll with their members regarding personal masking preferences. The results are as follows:*

*Which would be your preference regarding masking protocols in school?*

- *40.8% - The current mandatory masking protocol should remain in effect for the remainder of the school year*

- 20.8 % - *The current mandatory masking protocol should be abandoned as soon as allowable by the state. Masking should be optional*
- 38.3% - *Closter Schools should move from the current mandatory masking protocol to optional masking when certain members are met (low community spread, Cali score green, vaccination rates over 80%)*

Motion is approved by a roll call vote of the Board as follows:

YEAS: Ms. Fanelli, Ms. Kothari (virtual), Ms. Kwon, Dr. Puttannah, Ms. Wagner, Ms. Cross,  
Ms. Finkelstein

NAYS: Ms. Micera, Ms. Yeoh

**A. APPROVAL - Revision of Section A of Closter Public Schools' Plan for Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Service**

Motion to approve the following revision of Closter Public Schools' Plan for Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Service pursuant to the Federal American Rescue Plan Act, Section 2001(i):

*Section A Universal and Correct Wearing of Masks*

Students, school staff and visitors are required to wear face masks at all times, unless doing so would inhibit the individual's health or the individual is under two years of age. Visitors who refuse to wear a face mask will be denied entry to the school building. Administrators, teachers and staff will encourage mask wearing by modeling correct and consistent mask use. Closter Public Schools will comply with all updated directions and guidelines that will be provided by the New Jersey Department of Education and the New Jersey Department of Health for the 2021-2022 school year.

**CHANGE TO:**

Following the expiration of the NJ state mandate requiring school universal masking and updated guidelines received from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the New Jersey Department of Health, and after consultation with the Mid-Bergen Health Department, Closter Public Schools will follow an optional masking protocol beginning on March 7, 2022. Mandatory masking may be re-implemented in periods of elevated community transmission or for classes with active outbreaks. Students who return to school during days 6 - 10 of isolation or quarantine will be required to wear a mask or must remain at home for the full 10 days of quarantine.

**PUBLIC DISCUSSION**

Moved by Dr. Puttannah, seconded by Ms. Cross to open the meeting to public discussion.

*Ms. Lotito, 79 Pine Street - Thanked the Board for their decision to lift the mask mandate on March 7th.*

*Ms. Blum, 239 Parsels Lane - Thanked the Board for their decision to lift the mask mandate on*

March 7th.

Ms. Jaime, 83 Hickory Lane, would like to make sure any bullying incidents would also include teachers.

Moved by Ms. Micera, seconded by Ms. Cross to close the meeting to public discussion.

**CLOSED SESSION MOTION (If required)**

Moved by Ms. Kwon, seconded by Ms. Micera to approve the following Closed Session Motion. Motion was approved by a voice vote of the Board:

YEAS: Ms. Fanelli, Ms. Kothari (virtual), Ms. Kwon, Ms. Micera, Dr. Puttanniah, Ms. Wagner, Ms. Yeoh,  
Ms. Cross, Ms. Finkelstein

NAYS: None

BE IT RESOLVED that the Closter Board of Education will adjourn to a Closed Session to discuss the following:

**Legal Matters**

The matters so discussed will be disclosed to the public as soon as and to the extent that such disclosure can be made without adversely affecting the public.

The Board went into Closed Session at 6:51 PM.

The Board reconvened from Closed Session at 7:39 PM.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Moved by Ms. Micera, seconded by Ms. Yeoh to adjourn the meeting at 7:40 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Flojo M. Villanueva, Jr.

Business Administrator/Board Secretary