

JOHANNA RAVENHURST, Chair
TONY JUDGE, Vice-Chair
KAREN WALSH PIO, LICSW, LADC 1, Clerk
JESSICA COLLINS
CHRISTINE MCKIERNAN, MD

SHARON D. HART, Public Health Director

Board of Health Minutes

August 31, 2021

As Approved September 28, 2021

Present: Johanna Ravenhurst, Chair; Karen Walsh Pio, Clerk; Jessica Collins, Board of Health Member; Dr. Christine McKiernan, Board of Health Member; Sharon Hart, Public Health Director; Jennifer Jernigan, Assistant Public Health Director; Monasia Ceasar, Health Compliance Specialist; Dr. Jahmal Mosley, Superintendent of South Hadley Public Schools

The Board of Health Meeting was called to order at 6:06 p.m. by Chair Ravenhurst.

1. Acceptance of Minutes

Chair Ravenhurst mentioned the minutes from the Executive Session need approval. If changes to the minutes are necessary, they must be emailed over as they cannot be discussed in the meeting. Walsh Pio mentioned she never received the minutes or agenda packet as she could not gain access to her town issued email address. Collins made the motion to accept the Executive Session minutes and Dr. McKiernan second it. A roll call was taken.

Dr. Christine McKiernan: Aye
Jessica Collins : Aye
Karen Walsh Pio: Abstaining
Johann Ravenhurst: Aye

Chair Ravenhurst mentioned the July 20, 2021 meeting minutes also needed approval. Prior to approving the minutes, she had one correction to introduce. The mention of School Department in the minutes should be replaced with School Committee. With the understanding that the correction would be made, Dr. McKiernan made a motion to accept the meeting minutes and Collins second it. A roll call was taken.

Dr. Christine McKiernan: Aye
Jessica Collins: Aye
Karen Walsh Pio: Abstaining
Johanna Ravenhurst: Aye

Director Hart mentioned she would follow up with IT to address the email issue. Moving forward, Board of Health correspondence will be sent to both of Walsh Pio's email addresses to avoid this mishap.

2. Announcements and Open Forum:

Chair Ravenhurst verified there were no memos left in the open forum for discussion.

3. New Business:

(A) COVID-19 Update

Chair Ravenhurst announced that Superintendent Mosley was present at the meeting and would be discussing COVID-19 as it pertains to South Hadley Public Schools. Chair Ravenhurst asked Director Hart to provide an update on the town cases. Director Hart shared the transmission rates. There were 38 confirmed cases and 14 close contacts this week.

Town Administration has issued a mask mandate in public buildings and has sent out a mask request to all local businesses. Private businesses can mandate mask wearing within their establishments on their own. A town-wide mask mandate would be difficult to enforce. Walsh Pio mentioned that mask mandates are being issued in other towns and questioned what their management and enforcement strategies are. Director Hart expressed she was unaware of the enforcement strategies being used by other towns but notes that ambassadors were previously utilized to provide education and awareness efforts throughout towns. Walsh Pio asked for best practice suggestions as some businesses are not requiring masks in their establishments.

Hart mentioned that mandating mask wearing is based upon case occurrences within an area. Towns do not have the personnel to enforce mask mandates. Last year, the state issued the mandate and oversaw the managing and enforcing aspect of it.

Collins suggested being considerate of Dr. Mosley's time and allow him to present. The Board could revisit the current topic after the Superintendent has had an opportunity to present.

(B) COVID-19 Guidance for Public Schools

Dr. Mosley introduced himself and stated that it is important to set clear expectations for the new school year and to ensure that everyone is on the same page. Mask wearing will be mandated in all South Hadley Schools. The focus on the first day of school will be placed on mental health check-ins and building mask stamina as the faculty, staff, and students have become accustomed to not wearing them. If eighty percent of the building is vaccinated, mask wearing will not be required. This will be a

goal for the Middle School and High School. Nurses have been trained on what to do when they encounter cases and/or close contacts in the school. The school's website now has a COVID-19 page with the latest related correspondence. The School Committee is currently working with the Health Department on creating a maskless community. The Middle School won't happen as 5th graders are currently ineligible for the vaccine.

The town-sponsored fireworks will provide an opportunity for residents and students to get vaccines and booster shots as needed. The School Committee is working towards creating a centralized place where all COVID related information can be available for families and staff. Each school has a designated COVID response team working on individual plans within the building. The plans will adjust as policy, guidelines, and occurrences change. The upcoming School Committee meeting will address these COVID teams and plans in depth. The teams are comprised of teachers, principals, social workers, nurses, and other affiliated staff members.

Once the younger students gain eligibility for the vaccine, the staff will work towards getting them vaccinated. The focus will be on creating a safe environment to conduct in-person learning. Staff will develop alternative strategies to include outdoor learning as much as possible. Dr. Mosley mentioned it is a team effort and the School Department is open to receiving any suggestions and support that will aid the Department in having a safe and successful in person learning school year. The School Committee is working on establishing the parameters and guidelines on COVID accurate and precise testing in schools. Currently, staffing is being analyzed to ensure there is an adequate amount of personnel to facilitate the task.

Dr. Christine McKiernan reflected on viewing the August 5th School Committee meeting in which Superintendent Mosley spoke about the mask mandate for the schools. She was thoroughly impressed with the discussion surrounding the mental health toll on students and providing check-in opportunities. This has been a stressful time for everyone and providing mental health support is important as students prepare to head back into in-person learning.

Dr. Mosley noted that everyone has been impacted by COVID and adjustments must be made to learn the new normal. Dr. McKiernan suggested utilizing school counselors and federal funding to provide additional resources to support mental health. Walsh Pio mentioned an influx in case loads during COVID while working as a clinician. She agreed with the mental health concerns of the students as previously mentioned. She also extended a warm welcome and empathy to the Superintendent as she has just recently retired from the South Hadley School system three years ago. Collins acknowledged that all attendees were masked at the Middle School open house and commended the staff on a great job orchestrating that.

Dr. McKiernan noted that mask wearing does not seem to be as big a problem among children, as it is adults. It is important that mask wearing is presented in a likeable fashion to further encourage students to wear them. The children will be able to make the necessary adaptations with the masks. She proposed a few questions regarding the tracking of cases in schools. She questioned if the schools will be tracking case occurrences as the state will no longer track school occurrences separately from those that arise within a town. If so, what will the tracking process look like and what modifications to policy will be made if case occurrences reach a certain threshold. She also questioned how the data collected will be used to help interpret transmission rates in the schools.

Director Hart responded that contact tracing will continue to be done within the schools. The parameters for contact tracing for schools differ than those utilized in other settings. DESE identifies a close contact as exposure that is less than 3 ft apart for more than 15 minutes. Being outside and on the bus with the windows down at least 4 inches would not result in a close contact. Dr. McKiernan clarified that she was interested on whether the schools will be keeping track of how many cases they have in each school. The information from the tracking could be used to make improvements on prevention practices if clusters arise. Director Hart confirmed that such a system is not currently established. She is willing to collaborate with the school nurses, the community public health nurse and the Superintendent on developing a tracking system to identify COVID cases in the school community.

Superintendent Mosley mentioned that the state is currently pushing for vaccinations to those that are eligible and the Binax testing. The Binax tests are being dispersed free of charge by the state. The results from those tests will be recorded. The difficulty lies in the administering of the tests and the tracking of the results. The School Department is currently working on the logistics of it. This will remain a priority as the information gained from the testing and tracking can help keep students safe and help ensure that in-person learning can continue this year. Director Hart mentioned that there have been low transmission rates in school settings.

The schools will be working on establishing the Binax testing system as it helps replace the typical quarantine protocol. The strategy is referred to as “Test and Stay” and allows for students to stay in school if they are asymptomatic and test negative for five days using the Binax testing. Dr. McKiernan questioned if the vaccine will be mandated for staff now that it has received full FDA approval. Dr. Mosley mentioned that the evaluation of staffing will be done first. The proper staff is needed to properly execute testing and tracking. It must be identified whether nurses can effectively administer tests while executing their typical tasks. He also noted that they must consider that the job market is different, and they have to be selective to ensure that qualified personnel are appointed, so it’s important to be patient. Dr. McKiernan speculated that the need for Binax testing should not be large as mask wearing will be mandatory and outside exposure and those that are greater than three feet apart will not count as close contacts. Superintendent Mosley mentioned he had no further comment on

vaccine mandates at the time. The School District will circle back to follow up on this matter as the school year persists and developments arise and will stay in contact throughout the school year.

Walsh Pio questioned if the schools hosted any vaccine clinics last year and the possibility of hosting them this year. Director Hart mentioned the schools hosted two clinics last year. A mobile vaccine unit will be attending the town sponsored fireworks on September 4, 2021. Flyers were sent out to the schools, the news, and other media outlets. There is a link available for registration. The mobile vaccine unit will be administering second doses and boosters on September 25, 2021. The flu clinic is pending for October 7, 2021. CVS will be offering the COVID vaccine as well to interested parties. Depending on the need, a November vaccine clinic is being considered.

Chair Ravenhurst wrapped up the discussion on the reopening of the schools by highlighting the areas of focus. These areas include mental health, facilitating vaccine clinics and building the capacity for testing. Dr. McKiernan suggested reaching out to the School Committee prior to making the next meeting agenda to see if they need any support from the Board of Health.

To wrap up the discussion on mask mandates, Collins proposed investigating the enforcement component of the mask mandates. This would entail analyzing logistical strategies used by other towns, identifying any available funding, and determining the threshold that would end the mandate. Walsh Pio questioned who issues out the mask mandates for towns. Director Hart speculated that the mandates have come from both the respective Board of Health and Town Administration.

Collins questioned the standpoint of the current Town Administer. Director Hart responded that Town Administration agrees with the difficulty of enforcing such mandates and explored the possibility of issuing a mandate without the means to enforce. Instead, Town Administration chose to collaborate with local businesses and ask for their compliance as they can issue mandates for their establishments. Director Hart clarified that the change in Town Administrator occurs on November 1, 2021. Director Hart mentioned fines as a possible means for enforcement used by other towns. To do so, a tracking system, database, and distinct consequences would have to be established. Towns would then have to decide if this was a feasible option. Currently, the town is working with local businesses to urge patrons to wear masks while in the establishments.

Dr. McKiernan questioned the amount of confirmed positive cases for the week. Director Hart responded with 38 confirmed cases and 14 contacts. Hart confirmed that she sends out the weekly transmission numbers to the Board every Tuesday.

(C) Updates about the Drug & Alcohol Prevention Coalition

Walsh Pio mentioned that the coalition is active. The coordinator and director have been working to expand the coalition's collaboration with students, as it is a key strategy. Once schools reopen, the coalition will increase this involvement with High School students and Middle School students through a peer leadership group.

The coalition hosted a successful event at the senior's pre-graduation. Upon picking up their cap and gowns, students received a coalition sponsored gift bag. The bags included memos on safe graduation practices, parties, behaviors, and congratulatory trinkets. The coalition is looking forward to doing more events as school reopens with in-person learning.

Collins extended her gratitude to the coalition for all their hard work and effort. Walsh Pio said parents are appreciative of the coalition and are typically receptive to all their efforts as they need support raising teenagers. Currently, efforts are being made to target the social media and gaming addiction among the youth as another topic of concern. Director Hart mentioned that China has put a limit on gaming and social media to three hours a week with permitted use only allowed on the weekends. Walsh Pio agreed to share updates on the coalition including hard statistics on drug usage and other related items. She also highlighted the impact quarantine has had on underage drug use, as kids aren't socializing as much and can't easily gain access to the drugs.

The next virtual meeting was set for September 28, 2021, at 6pm.

Collins mentioned a concern that was brought forth by a constituent regarding the mold at the High School. She asked for clarification on who was responsible for addressing the situation. Director Hart mentioned the school and building facilities would be responsible. There are DPH resources available. The Health Department does not deal with mold testing. If the Health Department did get involved it would be to get state issued resources. DPH will do assessments of municipal buildings for free. This service was used at the previous Senior Center facility.

Chair Ravenhurst confirmed the next virtual meeting for September 28, 2021, at 6 pm. Chair Ravenhurst mentioned she would accept a motion to adjourn the meeting. Walsh Pio made the motion, and Dr. McKiernan seconded it. A roll call was taken.

Karen Walsh Pio: Aye

Dr. Christine McKiernan: Aye

Jessica Collins: Aye

Johanna Ravenhurst: Aye

The meeting was adjourned at 8:08 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Monasia Ceasar
Health Compliance Specialist

As Approved – Board of Health
Meeting Minutes
August 31, 2021

ATTACHMENT A

DOCUMENT

RECORD LOCATION

BOH Letter to School Committee

BOH File

Letter from MDESE dated August 31, 2021

BOH File

Memo from MDESE dated August 13, 2021

BOH File