



Conestoga Valley School District
2110 Horseshoe Road
Lancaster, PA 17601
Superintendent Comments
November 15, 2021



Thank you Mr. President.

In times of crisis, there will always be loud, dissenting opinions from both sides; people from both sides telling you what you should or shouldn't do. Too often those opinions are full of vitriol and personal attacks and only serve to alienate.

As a leader during these times, one must know the difference between opinion and fact, and not act on opinion; rather to have an established plan and follow that plan with fidelity.

When COVID abruptly interrupted schools on March 17, 2020, we had no plan; we were waiting for facts to come out about the pandemic. As such, we used another leadership strategy, we maximized the utilization of our resources, both material and human; we designed a progressive online educational program with the hope that we would return to normal in August of 2020.

Unfortunately, that did not occur; however, we were fortunate in that we had time to develop a plan that allowed for in-person instruction as well as a virtual, online option. This plan was adopted and signed by me and the President of the Board. If you recall, that plan was also met with loud opposition. The vocal side at the time strongly voiced their opinion that schools should not be open for in-person instruction five days a week. During that school year, the Board supported the administration's implementation of the plan; again, we followed the plan. We complied with State and federal guidelines and we ended up keeping schools open every day for the 80% of our population, with the other 20% opting for some sort of virtual program.

Again, hoping for a normal start to 2021/2022, we again had to develop a Health and Safety Plan. In July, 2021, the Board approved the Plan. Built within the Plan was the flexibility for the administration to make the wearing of facial coverings optional, except in the case where the number of active cases hit a certain threshold at the elementary levels. The focus on the elementary buildings was due to the fact that, at the time, our students aged 5 – 11 were not eligible for the optional vaccine. We started the year out under those guidelines, again following the approved plan. Once again, there was vocal opposition to starting this way; this time by those who wanted mandatory masking in place.

On September 7, 2021, the Acting Secretary of Health issued an Order regarding the wearing of facial coverings in school buildings. Part of our approved plan states that the District "will adhere to any

existing, valid and binding orders from the PA DOH/PDE/CDC regarding facial coverings.” By following the plan, and adhering to the Order, we heard vocal opposition from the complete opposite side of the spectrum, those who did not want to wear masks. We understood that there were legal challenges to the Order, but until those challenges were exhausted, to include all appeals, we continued to follow the plan and adhere to the Order.

This brings me to last Wednesday. We were informed in the afternoon that the Commonwealth Court had sided with the plaintiff against the validity of the Masking Order based upon procedural issues. As such, we followed the plan and again reverted to face coverings being optional. With that shift in practice, we also heard opposition from those families against the optional masking. Once the Secretary of Health filed the appeal and we were able to verify that the appeal resulted in a legal stay being issued by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, we again followed the Plan and reverted back to following the Mask Order. Now we are hearing opposition against the wearing of masks.

We will continue to follow our plan, to adhere to existing, valid and binding orders from PA DOH/PDE/CDC. This applies to following the current Order until all appeals from either side have been exhausted. While there are many opinions out there, the legal facts are that the stay mandates continued implementation of the Order. Coincidentally, the lead attorney who brought suit against the State acknowledged that same fact; he stated that he, as a school solicitor, would advise his districts to follow the Order.

For both sides out there, we truly feel your frustration. Like you, we’re tired of COVID. We’re also tired of the lack of civility; the divide in society between one side and other, with schools planted squarely in the middle; the inability to communicate with an open mind, what we call a growth mindset; the seemingly arbitrary rulings applying facial coverings only to school buildings; the lack of proactive communication from PA DOH, PDE and the Governor’s office; the impact COVID (both the virus and the collateral damage) has had on our children and education system – physical illness, social/emotional issues, educational interruptions/modifications, staffing both at the support and professional levels, school support and trust; and the negative impact on the CV family and the families of CV.

As tired as we are, we cannot make decisions based on opinion, no matter how passionate. As we have seen here in CV, there are two passionate groups of people with opposing thoughts who sincerely believe that their position is the right one. Again, in this time of crisis, we must rely on the stability of a solid plan. The first one stood the test of a full year of a new virus while providing in-person and virtual instruction to over 4000 amazing students! This year’s plan is standing the test of competing factors and results at the executive, legislative and judicial levels of the state. Not everyone will like or support every outcome, but that no matter the outcome by the Courts, Governor or Congress, we need to continue to support the school system. We have been placed in an impossible situation, but we will continue to provide the best education possible as we follow the Plan.

That’s all Mr. President.

