

## Community Response 11/18/2021 Board of Education Meeting

Good Afternoon, Mustang Families. We are writing today to provide some feedback regarding questions raised during our 11/18 BOE Meeting. For the sake of clarity, we are responding directly to the individual statements or concerns, rather than mentioning the speakers' names.

### First Speaker:

- This person expressed her continued concern over masking mandates at MCS.
  - By now, we all understand that it is not the schools that created the masking mandates. This was a proclamation of the NYS Department of Health (NYSDOH). No school, Morris included, has the ability to ignore a state mandate, particularly about public health.
  - The Speaker's child did a fantastic job presenting their experiences with masks at MCS. The student was an eloquent speaker, and you must have been very proud of their poise. The message was heard, and appreciated.
  - Several readers may recall that back in August 2021, we offered a very different reopening plan than the one NYSED and NYSDOH forced upon us. We understand your frustrations, and share them. It isn't as easy as saying, "Just don't follow the State rules." The state could come in here, remove the Board, and revoke Dr. Babbie's license if we do not comply. The place to express your opposition to masking mandates is not at school, it is in Albany; it is with letters to our local legislators. You, The People, have to make your will known.
  - To be candid, we have heard directly that some folks think pulling their kids out of school will put pressure on MCS that we will then apply to Albany. The intention of this idea is understood but will not produce the desired result. As mentioned above, energy should be directed to those who make the mandates that apply to school districts.
- The First Speaker also asked for a commitment from MCS to not host a vaccination clinic at school.
  - With all due respect, MCS will offer a clinic to parents who choose to have their child(ren) vaccinated, because that is a choice we can still offer. We want families to have as many health care opportunities as possible, and we support their right to choose whether their child(ren) should receive the vaccination.
  - Additionally, School-based Health will offer vaccination with appointment.

### Second Speaker:

- This person asked why schools are allowing routine weekly screening testing of students and staff. We are doing so to abide by NYSDOH regulations. The Otsego County DOH told us that only send-away PCR tests can be used to return to school after COVID-19 infection. There seems to be some confusion in the community as to the use of antigen tests or PCR tests. Here at school, we use the rapid antigen test to detect COVID. A PCR can confirm with a much higher degree of precision if the person actually has COVID.
- Dr. Babbie will ask DOH on Tuesday for clarification of testing to return policies.

### Third Speaker

- This person expressed a concern that MCS is following different protocols than some of its neighboring school districts in the County. When it comes to masking, quarantine, and isolation, that information comes to us directly from the Otsego DOH. They provided us with a decision tree and a flow chart of who would be quarantined in classroom situations, on the bus, and during sports. Simply put: We follow the tree. There is no room for interpretation. If we are misinterpreting State or County mandates, we will adjust accordingly.

### Fourth Speaker

- This person expressed a concern that the recent reason for moving to Remote Learning could have been more transparent.
  - While we agree that transparency is an ideal, we also have to balance the privacy of our personnel when making announcements. That means avoiding announcements that may inadvertently reveal the health status of our employees. If you would like to read more about this, please see [FERPA](#) and [HIPAA](#) regulations in the embedded links.
- The Fourth Speaker also asked the BOE to consider alternatives for remote or virtual instruction for students who were isolated or quarantined. Specifically, additional synchronous learning opportunities were requested, with fewer pages of materials that are perceived as “busy work” sent home.
  - NYSED provided no instructions or mandates for live learning this year. Prior to this school year, it was mandated as an option because entire districts were shut down.
  - With about 18 months experience with this, we can tell you that virtual synchronous learning can be extremely intensive, and very taxing for teachers. Based on faculty feedback, it is significantly more work to teach a class and a remote learner at the same time, not less work.
  - Professionally, we also have privacy concerns with a synchronous model (and even recorded lessons, to a degree) as unexpected disciplinary issues may inadvertently be broadcast during live sessions. It is critical to keep FERPA in mind here.
  - Teachers do post lesson materials to Google Classroom, so students will not be left behind during their time home.
  - Additionally, students will have the opportunity to interact with teachers via after-school tutoring, upon request.
  - Dr. Babbie surveyed the 19 other districts in our BOCES to find:
    - 5 districts do offer some sort of access to live streaming, but it is limited to 3-12, 5-12, or 7-12 grades, and it is on a voluntary basis.
      - *MCS currently offers this option in cases where entire classrooms or grades are quarantined/isolated*
    - 5 districts do not offer this option at any level
    - 9 districts did not respond

Thank you.