



July 12, 2021

Good Morning,

On June 17, 2021, I spoke at the School Board Rule Development Meeting urging the board to keep the mask mandate at least for elementary schools based on science and the opinion of medical experts. The CDC agrees, and their [recommendations can be found at this link](#).

I urge you to follow the advice of scientists, medical experts and the CDC regarding mask policies and indeed all COVID related policies for the upcoming school year. With all students returning in the Fall for face to face classes, safety must be a priority. We know that recommended social distancing guidelines will be impossible to follow in our crowded classrooms and schools. We also must acknowledge that many OCPS teachers left the classroom last year because they just did not feel safe at their schools and workplaces and did not want to compromise their health or the health of family members. We also must acknowledge that students and teachers contracted COVID-19 from students and peers, despite the District's claim that there has been no in-school spread. We cannot expect those students or teachers who left OCPS to return to schools unless a safe environment can be assured and honesty is upheld.

Regarding the mask policy, Dr. Annette Nielsen, a pediatrician and member of the OCPS Medical Advisory Committee, was quoted by the [Orlando Sentinel](#) regarding the mask policy for the upcoming school year: "We have a civic, and medical and moral duty to protect them . . . Let's keep a mask on these kiddos, until they and their families have the opportunity to be vaccinated."

She is not alone. Just days ago, the CDC also released specific recommendations for the upcoming school year, including the statement, "Masks should be worn indoors by all individuals (age 2 and older) who are not fully vaccinated. Consistent and correct mask use by people who are not fully vaccinated is especially important indoors and in crowded settings, when physical distancing cannot be maintained." Since OCPS does not require proof of vaccination and vaccinations are still not available for children under age 12, the mask mandate must remain enforced in all elementary schools.

The CDC also “recommends schools maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classrooms, combined with indoor mask wearing by people who are not fully vaccinated, to reduce transmission risk. When it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of at least 3 feet, such as when schools cannot fully re-open while maintaining these distances, it is especially important to layer multiple other prevention strategies, such as indoor masking.” Because there is no possibility for proper social distancing with all students returning to schools, this is another reason why mask mandates are even more important. Furthermore, OCPS does not monitor or require proof of vaccination for students or employees.

The CDC recommendations also included this statement, “COVID-19 prevention strategies remain critical to protect people, including students, teachers, and staff, who are not fully vaccinated, especially in areas of moderate-to-high community transmission levels.” Currently, [Orlando is considered “at high risk”](#) because of the surge in cases related to the Delta COVID-19 variant and the variant reportedly affects the younger population more than the other variants. [Only 27% of children ages 12-17 are fully vaccinated in Orange County according to the Florida Department of Health.](#) Only 60% of the total population of our County has been vaccinated. Furthermore, even though they are rare, there are break-through cases where vaccinated individuals have become infected.

At the June 17th meeting, the District allowed unmasked parents (many from Seminole and Volusia counties) and others to congregate in the lobby and then to sit in the audience without masks. It was unappreciated that Chair Teresa Jacobs asked *me* to put my mask up when I gave a statement at the microphone when so many in the audience were unmasked. Audience members were told by OCPS officials that we could remove our masks at the podium to speak, which is what I did. I am among those who have witnessed the district violating their own policies and signed agreements to the detriment of peoples’ health and well-being. I urge you to follow medical and CDC guidance and to enforce all policies and agreements in schools, worksites and at the School Board meetings.

Sincerely,



Wendy L. Doromal