

LETTER FROM MASC shared with Masconomet Regional School Committee Chair on November 16, 2021:

MASC is grateful to the members, sponsors, speakers, and guests who helped make our returning annual joint conference such a success. We look forward to continuing our informative professional development programs for school committees in the year ahead.

We do want to apologize to those members who, through no fault of their own, have been criticized in their communities for having been photographed without a mask and called out for appearing to have one standard for students but not for themselves. This is indeed not the case.

Four months prior to the convention, when we believed more severe restrictions might be in place for the spread of a variant strain of COVID and while there were still thousands of people who had not yet been vaccinated, we informed members in an edition of the MASC Bulletin that masks would be required in all public spaces during the conference, except during meals or other food/beverage functions. We subsequently realized that the quality of sound at the host venue—which has been problematic over the past few years—would have resulted in sessions being largely inaudible unless speakers were allowed to remove masks during their presentations. This was going to be especially true in sessions held in larger than normal-sized rooms, or in rooms where we were streaming the program to a virtual audience.

Following up on our original notice, we took several additional steps to ensure the safety of both the facility and the members. Our friends at CASPR donated and installed separate, high-grade and effective standing air purifiers that have a superior record of filtering and disinfecting meeting rooms. These devices were placed in every meeting room, dining area, and public areas of the hotel and proved highly effective as promised. In addition to multiple hand-sanitizing stations located throughout the hotel and in meeting/dining areas, each room was wiped clean after each session and microphones were disinfected. On arrival, every attendee was also given a personal hand cleanser.

Finally, in order to ensure that attendees could be appropriately social-distanced, we capped attendance for the first time in conference history, reduced the number of overall sessions, and eliminated our popular exhibit hall space.

As a result, the Hotel and Conference Center was one of the safest places to convene this fall, and we are happy that there have been no health-related incidents. Coincidentally, by the time the conference was held, the town of Barnstable was no longer requiring indoor masking in private and commercial establishments and, prior to our arrival, the convention center had signage limiting masking to those who were unvaccinated.

Many of the attendees who have been criticized were either speakers or were photographed during meals or at venues with food/beverages where masks were not required. Also, in fairness to the attendees, some may not have even been aware of the original masking guidance and were basing behavior on their understanding of Barnstable protocols.

The tempest that has been raised about seemingly inconsistent behaviors on the part of local school leaders is not a case of double standards. They are simply enforcing the law and regulation and the mask-wearing in K-12 schools is a requirement that currently extends through January 2022.

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