

Get the masks off our children.

calvin.mellish@gmail.com

Outdoor meals during COVID

At your last meeting, it was stated that classes should eat outside as much as possible. There was also mention of picnic tables that had been ordered for schools. This made it seem like there was a district-wide plan for meals to be moved outside, and resources and supplies for schools to do this.

Upon inquiring at my elementary school and others in the district, it appears that:

1) The tables will not arrive before school starts, nor is there an estimated date of delivery, even though principals put in requests before March.

2) Absent a district-wide approach and resources, teachers and schools have taken it upon themselves to solve this issue, with grassroots efforts that have ended up with some elementary schools essentially building outdoor cafeterias, funded by parents, while other schools have kids sitting on the ground. At these schools, students are taken outside only when the weather is cool enough, or it is not raining, and when a teacher is able and willing to do so. The teacher or assistant themselves also must sit on the ground, in the heat with no shade at some schools, unless they purchase their own portable chair.

District solutions are needed now, and cannot wait until tables arrive at an elusive date, at which time, elementary students might be eligible for vaccinations.

Delta is in our community NOW. Kids are unvaccinated NOW. School starts NEXT WEEK, and there is NO mandate or executable plan for all students to eat all meals outside.

I am part of an effort at our elementary school to gather as many popup tents and picnic tables, yoga mats and seats as possible, a week before school starts. One of the biggest hurdles has been parents asking: Why isn't the district doing this? I agree, and I would like answers to this question myself.

Groups of unvaccinated people eating indoors during Delta is a terrible idea. It is putting our kids in danger and is a sure way for the entire district to have to return to remote schooling for the fall. I would like to see better leadership in this area and better support for our teachers and students.

Andrea Lorenz Nenque

Hello,

Starting this fall, I'll have 2 elementary-aged children attending Glenwood- a 4th grader and KG student. I am writing to strongly advocate for remote options and more stringent screening and mitigation measures on/in school premises.

The only Covid mitigation measures I've been able to see so far is that you are mandating mask usage indoors. Given how highly transmissible Delta is, I'm concerned that masking up is not enough; especially now that you'll be back to full capacity. Last year when you had in-person/hybrid, classrooms were not at full capacity, allowing for greater social distancing. We also weren't dealing with Delta. Now you are talking about returning to school at full capacity with even less mitigation measures and a more transmissible variant. This just isn't adding up to me as being safe.

I can't understand why we can't do a hybrid model in which in-person classes are conducted and separate but analogous fully remote classes are happening. IN other words, have some teachers dedicated to fully remote instruction; and others in-person with greater social distancing.

I also want to know what other measures have been put in place to mitigate the spread of Covid esp. w/ regard to Delta? For example:

- Have you updated the ventilation system? Will windows be kept open?
- Will children eat lunches in their classrooms?
- Have you added more desks and chairs so children can socially distance and NOT share tables? And/or did you put up plexiglass shields between students?
- Will you do temperature checks upon arrival?
- What will you do with students who don't wear masks? Will they be allowed to mix with students who do?
- Are all staff who can get vaccinated, vaccinated? Will those who can't/won't be tested regularly for Covid?

If these are currently not being implemented, I implore you to do so. Delta is spreading like wildfire among youth and while they may recover fast, no one knows how many will end up with long Covid or other issues years from now. As you might know, Chickenpox (varicella) has been shown to result in painful shingles outbreaks decades after initial infection. How do we know Covid might not have some awful side-effects decades from now?

I really don't want to gamble with my children's health, both present and future. I'm feeling frustrated and not at all reassured by the CHCCS's response to the Delta variant, and the clearly rising number of infections.

Please do more!

Thanks,

Sangeeta Desai
she/her/hers

Dear CHCCS School Board,
Good morning,

I am a parent of 2 CHCCS students (3rd and 8th) and I have become pretty disturbed/concerned with the current rate of transmission of the delta variant within our community/state. While I know you all voted to have a mask mandate in place when school starts, I believe families should have a remote learning option (as there was last school for the less contagious variant of SARS-CoV-2) especially given children under the age 12 cannot be vaccinated against SARS-CoV-2. While mask wearing is a reasonable strategy to prevent transmission (not eliminate), this approach (to my knowledge) has not been scientifically proven to be effective at reducing transmission in the school setting against the significantly more contagious delta variant. Currently, outbreaks in different states show children can become seriously ill from the delta variant and may not be as impervious to SARS-CoV-2 as originally thought during the early phases of this pandemic.

All said, we are in an entirely new phase of the pandemic and with the confluence of the current surge (in N.C.), the extremely contagious delta variant, the winter, flu season, rise in RSV cases, the threat posed to children is far more formidable than at any other point in the pandemic. While in person learning is certainly superior to remote learning in the long run, the risk of serious illness (even death) in the short term should far outweigh these benefits. I implore you to at least consider adding a remote learning option for grades K-8 for parents of children who are at risk of serious illness.

I would be interested in speaking with you all of you in more detail about these concerns,

Thanks for your consideration.

andrew84@email.unc.edu

Hi Board Members,

I am a parent of an 8th grader, a 5th grader and a 1st grader. I fully support requiring vaccines for all middle and high school students who want to play sports, be a cheerleader or join the marching band, chorus or theater.

This is a simple and free way to ensure that our students are able to safely participate in these extra curricular activities even amidst the rising threat of the Delta Variant.

Thank you for taking such strong steps to keep our students safe.

Meagan Bell

Dear Board,

I share many of the concerns about institutional integrity that Dr. Hamlett addressed in her last public announcement. Last year the virtual learning environment was shut down early before school ended, and our kids lost instructional days.

Now for this year, I'm hearing about problems finding coaches for the Smith Middle School boys soccer team. I don't know if this means there will be a season for these hard-working kids or not. All I do know is that they need recreation and social opportunities.

Honestly, I continue to be disappointed. Our students have been through enough trauma from being isolated. Can you please help our students have a normal-social-public-education? One filled with sports, and allows many walks of life to come together to reach a common goal.

As of now, Smith Middle has no long-term principal and many missing coaches. Certainly, not very promising.

Enough is enough,
Bryan Yonish

As a parent I just want to say thank you to the teachers and administrators - what extraordinary times and y'all have responded with such compassion and resolve. I have been amazed by what our teachers have been asked to do and how well they responded. There is again uncertainty after months of hopeful expectations that the worst is past us. I hope our whole community will continue to be patient as everyone grapples with what is the best approach for the different schools, classes and children as the pandemic continues. I am so sorry for any additional work this might present to all our educators. I want to make sure to at least give a big thank you for all you do for our kids, community and the future. We see you and we appreciate you! Hopefully within months it will be safe to vaccinate younger children and the worst will truly be over.

Brian Hare

1. Why are staff not required to be vaccinated from COVID? Is there a legal barrier? It's clearly in the best interests of children, which should be primary here. UFT just got behind it, why not this district?

2. Outdoor masking isn't recommended by CDC. Why are we mandating this?
Transmission risk outdoors is extremely low, and unmasking outdoors would provide a great break for kids. Seems quite silly, especially in light of no vaccination mandate for staff.

Daniel O'Keefe

I just want to say I've been so impressed with the way CHCCS has conducted itself throughout the pandemic. I have always felt my child was as safe as she could be and that when things changed so did CHCCS to accommodate the new circumstances.

We are excited that our 2nd grader gets to go back to school and will receive the valuable experience of in person instruction.

You all are doing an amazing job and our family is so grateful for your service and commitment.

Kind regards,

Kendra Knowles

Dear Board Members,

As we face school openings amidst another surge of Covid, recent medical and scientific evidence show that most people affected by the Delta variant were not vaccinated. Many employers, private and public, are beginning to require all employees who are eligible to be vaccinated to work on site unless they receive an exemption from a medical doctor due to pre-existing conditions.

Is this a possibility you've considered for all CHCCS staff? Particularly those that work in elementary schools (and potentially middle) where children under 12 cannot get vaccines, yet?

- Several of our elementary school buildings are older, less well-ventilated (Seawell, Estes Hill, Ephesus, Glenwood)
- Younger children require more proximate support with learning tasks but also small group instruction
- Taking proactive precautions to reduce outbreaks, which lead to absences (students and staff and use of substitute-teachers) would support us having a smoother year.

Thank you for your consideration.

Dr. Son Young Hahm

Hello,

I am a parent of an premature daughter who had to literally fight to be on this earth for 3 months. Her father and I do not feel comfortable sending her to school with the Delta out here.

Why isn't there an option for virtual this year for the younger children K-8 who are not eligible for the vaccine? I'm supposed to put my trust into the school to keep my daughter safe and if something happens to her who is going to be held responsible?

We have been taking all the right precautions to keep her safe and now we are forced to send her to school where none of you can guarantee us that our children will be safe.

Two very upset parents of a kindergartner

MARCUS FARROW

Dear CHCCS,

Please keep high school in person and 5 days a week. Do not change this...

These kids need to get back to normal life and normal education. We have a very high percentage of vaccinated students and they can wear masks. We are a responsible community and take this virus serious but, big picture, another year of online education will harm more of these kids long term than this latest variant.

Sincerely,

A parent of two high school students.

jason brice

After reviewing the recent public comments, I'm concerned that the focus is pulled away by a vocal minority in the community.

We have limited resources. Teachers and staff were stretched too thin in the pre-pandemic environment. There is a real issue in our community for an equitable education to all. Cost per student is only going to rise, and more will suffer by trying to cater to everyone's individual wants. Trying to meet every unique need and wish is not realistic and is at the detriment of the larger student population.

The focus for the 2021-2022 should be on educating in person and following the recommendation of the CDC in how to do this safely. By all measures, the community has risen to the challenge of this pandemic with the highest vaccination rate in the state (76% with two doses) and among the lowest case #s per 100K. We have observed for months how other communities across state have been able to educate in person safely.

We owe it to our students make our singular focus to be safely delivered in person instruction.

Bill Langston
Parent of 6th & 8th Grade Students

Given the surge in the Delta variant, new data showing that vaccinated individuals can spread COVID 19, the increasing number of breakthrough cases, data showing a decrease in effectiveness of existing vaccines against the Delta variant, and the inability of children under 12 to be vaccinated, and the fact that our local health care system is currently overwhelmed to the point that they are cancelling surgeries because they do not have beds, why are we moving forward with in person school when remote school has been an option during safer times over the course of the pandemic?

Betsy (Sarah E.) Bledsoe, PhD, MPhil, MSW

Dear CHCCS Board of Education Members:

The decision to resume in-person classroom attendance at the very beginning of the 2021-22 school year is very problematic for reasons outlined in the news stories below. I have no doubt that many more can be added to this list without much effort.

['The risks are too high': UNC-CH faculty sign petition to move classes online | CBS 17](#)

['Parents are scared' as Wake schools prepare to reopen amid surge in COVID cases \(msn.com\)](#)

[COVID-19 surge in Florida school district forces thousands of students to isolate, quarantine | Fox News](#)

[Over 1,000 Nashville students in COVID-related quarantine after first week of school | Fox News](#)

As proposed by UNC-CH faculty, I think it would be far better to error on the side of caution to minimize – to the highest degree possible – the risk of our children being exposed to the COVID-19 delta variant by delaying the start of in-person attendance 4 – 6 weeks to permit as many school staff, students (age 12 and older) and parents as possible to become fully vaccinated. I also think it is of paramount importance to protect those students who are not yet eligible to be vaccinated against this terrible virus (under age 11).

I received an e-mail earlier today announcing the collaborative effort on the part of CHCCS, the Orange County Health Department and Optum to offer a FREE vaccination clinic on Wednesday, August 18 (see below). I think this is a fantastic outreach idea to increase the number of vaccinated individuals. A delay of only four (4) weeks to the start of in-person attendance would allow individuals receiving their first Pfizer dose on this date (second dose given on September 8) to be within two (2) days of being fully vaccinated by the start of in-person attendance on September 20 (a delay of only four (4) weeks).

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my perspective on this extremely important health issue, and its impact on the new school year.

Most respectfully,

Michael Williams

As a parent of a 4th grader and middle schooler, and as a primary care physician within the local community, I wanted to first take an opportunity to thank the teachers and staff who have continued to care for our kids throughout these last eighteen months. Thank you also to the Board for continuing to help the community struggle through very difficult and ever changing COVID circumstances and state mandates.

As one of many outpatient physicians who have continued to see patients through the pandemic, including COVID patients, I'm saddened by the situation this country finds itself in. The presence of the Delta variant was inevitable but now our hospitals are full again after the census had continually dropped the first six months of the year. COVID vaccines are safe and effective. The situation really did not have to be this bad. Over 90 percent of hospitalized people are unvaccinated. We also see a worrisome trend of increased pediatric hospitalizations, especially in the southern states.

I am grateful for the common sense measures that the Board has already put in place including mandatory masking and plans for testing unvaccinated teachers and staff. However, I am asking you to consider further measures for the elementary schools where none of the children will likely be eligible for vaccination until the end of the year at the earliest. I would like to see either an all virtual option for the elementary schools or a half day option where kids can do in person class during the morning and go home for lunch and learn virtually for the afternoon in an effort to avoid unnecessary unmasked time. I would also ask that the Board consider a COVID vaccine mandate when the FDA approves the vaccines in the 16 and older age group.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Regards,
Anne J. West M.D

As parents of an 11th grader at ECHHS, we are very excited for the upcoming, in-person school year. We are writing to encourage you to continue with the plans being made for in-person high school. The CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics both recommend in-person instruction with appropriate safety protocols as best for children's wellbeing. Our kids need to receive in-person instruction to learn most effectively and to grow socially. The plans you are making for masking within the schools, particularly at the high school level where most students should have access to vaccination, represents a safe and educationally beneficial outcome. Please continue to follow the science and recommendations that say our students can learn in-person, safely. We feel that it is important for children at all levels (elementary, middle school, and high school) to have the option for in-person education. As one of us is an instructor at Duke who has been teaching in person since August 2020, we know it can be done safely.

Ann Saterbak and David Ward

I am writing in reference to my daughter who is a student at East Chapel Hill High. With the recent surge in the Delta variant of the virus, I am wondering if there has been any consideration to providing high school students with a remote learning option, similar to what was done at the end of last year, where students could either attend in person or remotely. The number of daily cases in North Carolina is now consistently above 4,000, which is close to the highest it has ever been. Although our daughter is vaccinated, breakthrough infections are occurring, and our daughter has health issues that make her more susceptible to the virus. We are aware of the High School Virtual Learning Academy, but it does not offer all the courses she would like to take. Please let me know your thoughts. Thank you.

mgzelig@gmail.com

- I would like to see a distance learning option, at least until my child is fully vaccinated.
- How will lunch be handled? Durham ISD is talking about outside tents. Ephesus elementary said today that the hot meals will be given inside the classrooms and that there are no tents. Will taking my child home for meals be an option?

Thank you

dr.scovey@gmail.com

Greetings,

The school calendar shows that students are off on Valentine's day (Feb 14) instead of President's Day (Feb 21). Please explain why?

Thank you,
Ricardo Martinez

To the CHCCS Board:

In light of the pandemic, I am at a loss to understand the agreed-upon policies for the start of the 2021-2022 school year.

I fail to comprehend why there is not a vaccine requirement for all students of eligible age. There should also be a requirement for faculty, staff, and administration. We require vaccines for chickenpox. But when it comes to a virus from which people are dying, we don't require the vaccine?

Given that there is no vaccine requirement, there should absolutely be a remote option that allows our students to remain at their home schools. We would like our students' transcripts to reflect that they attended the schools to which they are districted, not Phoenix Academy.

With the present policies in place, there is no doubt in my mind that we will have numerous clusters of Covid and they will occur soon.

I would urge the board to reconsider its positions in regard to vaccines and remote instruction.

Cordially,

Elisabeth Smith

Hi. Due to the heightening transmissibility of the Delta variant and the fact that most kids in the district have not yet been vaccinated against COVID-19, please consider enacting a district wide policy that all meals and snacks will take place outdoors except during extreme weather events. If schools need supplies to make this happen, please publish lists of needed supplies so that members of the community can help provide them.

Thank you

Tab Combs

Hello,

I am Paul Caldwell, former Seawell, Phillips, and CHHS student, UNC graduate, 31-year Chapel Hill resident, and father of a rising 5th grader.

I am dismayed about our district's approach to school this year, especially in light of the Delta variant, which is both more transmissible and more dangerous to children than what we faced last year. Being overly optimistic and reckless is why we have the Delta variant. I think mandating a return to in-person education is foolish and dangerous. It is the kind of policy that will facilitate the creation of even worse variants.

I am still very confused about why the district is not mandating vaccination for those able to get it and allowing a virtual option for those who cannot. There are still so many unanswered questions. Here are the ones that are most pressing on my mind.

1) Why is the district allowing school families to make personal choices regarding whether or not to get vaccinated but not allowing personal choices regarding in-person or virtual learning?

2) Pre-Delta variant rule of 3 was a) masks, b) outdoors, and c) 6' distance. Requiring students to return to the classroom will break 2 of those 3 rules. What equally or more effective measures will the district implement to replace the 2 the district will break?

3) How will schools verify vaccination of staff and students 12+ years old? For those who are not vaccinated, how will the schools verify the weekly negative tests? What is the science that suggests weekly negative tests are as effective as vaccination?

4) What kind of financial support will the district provide to families that contract COVID from school this year? Is the district prepared to shoulder the cost of the hospitalizations and possible death that requiring the return to in-person education may cause?

5) Cloth masks are proving insufficient protection against the Delta variant. 3-ply surgical masks are now the standard protection short of N95. Will the school district provide 3-ply surgical masks to anyone unable to acquire them?

6) What preparations have been taken to ensure a smooth transition to hybrid or virtual learning in the event of another lockdown?

My granddaughter had an awesome year in remote learning. Thank you and her teachers for providing that excellent education. But this year she really needs to be in school. As a rising 2nd grader, she and her classmates are unvaccinated and are therefore at greater risk. I am asking could lunches and snacks be eaten outside when at all possible to help keep these children in school. If additional funds are needed to accomplish this I will help raise them.

Thank you for your consideration
Carol Combs

Please reconsider the mandate that our children cover their faces. The students are encouraged to practice tolerance and inclusion of a variety of beliefs. Aside from the physical discomfort, masking is demoralizing to many and those who feel it is not in their best interest should be respected. Many believe that being told by adults in charge to obstruct their means of breathing, obscure their smiles, and impede social interaction with peers also has detrimental effects.

If students and their parents weigh the objective evidence on risk of contracting any contagion and believe that wearing a mask makes them feel more protected then they should be free to wear a mask. Similarly, those who calculate more harm than benefit in face covering should be respected and allowed to participate freely, without judgement in school activities.

Thank you,
Laura Bageant

Dr. Hamlett and Board Members,

I am writing to you again today to address concerns about the lack of a districtwide set of eating standards which require mask removal and also to plead for a quality virtual option for our under 12 district children.

Most of the communications I am receiving from my children's schools regarding lunch and eating use terminology like "as much as possible", "as feasible" or "at teacher's discretion". Right now with Delta these statements are not good enough. All students, but specifically our under 12's, should be eating outside with distancing for all meals all the time with the exception of severe weather. This should be mandated at the district level and required of all schools. Breakfast within the classroom is not safe. Snack time indoors is not safe. Lunch inside not at all safe. Delta can transmit within seconds due to the high viral load. I watched the Orange County School Board meeting with the doctors from ABC Collaborative who we will be speaking with

today and what they said was very sobering. Meal times were specifically singled out as a high risk activity. Please mandate all meals and mask-less times are outdoors with appropriate distancing. If we truly want to protect the vulnerable this is the only option. Many parents have already sprang into action buying tents, tables, mats etc. to make this happen. Why were not ready to make this happen after last year? Why did we think indoor meals were going to be OK. Please specifically address this weakness in our current protocols.

I again ask, why was there no planning besides a full return to school for all students? Why did we not have a Plan B for the situation we are now currently in with a highly contagious variant that is infecting and increasingly hospitalizing unvaccinated children? Most of the other districts in our area offer virtual schooling for their students. Right now we need a viable alternative to in person learning. Every student that is able to stay home and out of school and off the diminishing busses will lower the risk of transmission within the school and within our community. With hospitals nearing capacity and no sign of rates slowing down, please come up with a viable virtual option for our under 12's. We should have had this planned in advance, but we are past that point now. Make an option that allows us to keep our kids safe at least until the surge ends or they can be vaccinated. Then allow them to return to school once it is safer than it is currently. We seem to be barreling ahead with the only option being full in person school for vulnerable children and then hoping for the best. Again, listening to the ABC Collaborative doctors did not assure me as a parent that masks alone will keep our under 12's safe. Please help the parents of at risk kids by offering virtual schooling.

I really feel for all the families, teachers, staff and, of course, you. These are difficult times with difficult choices. We are all so ready for this to recede into the background and reclaim our lives. Now is not the time to assume that normality is back in any sense. Let's do our best to keep everyone safe and not just hope for the best.

Thank you,

Scott Ganas

Dear Board and Superintendent's office,

As we prepare for the first day of school next week, I am writing with great concern that our schools do not have a formal policy about outdoor eating, despite the wealth of evidence and data that now confirms outdoor eating is much safer for preventing COVID-19 transmission than indoor eating.

I am the parent of two elementary school children (grades 1 and 4) who are too young to get vaccinated. I want my kids to benefit from all that our wonderful public schools have to offer, but I also want to know our schools are doing all they (and you all) can to keep our kids safe. We

keep hearing generally that teachers will try to have their classes eat outdoors but that it's up to the discretion of each teacher. This puts an unfair burden on the teachers and adds unnecessary risk to our children who get assigned classes with teachers that don't have the resources needed (e.g. mats, picnic tables, etc), access to shaded seating to have their class eat comfortably outside, or simply prefer indoor eating. Delta can transmit in mere minutes - that's all it takes. Why would we take that chance with our children, especially this far into the pandemic?

We can do better. The school district can do better.

I am writing to formally request the School Board take a decision at the district level that breakfast and lunches be outside effective immediately unless it is raining. I know it will take logistics and funding for resources to support outside meals, but as parents, we are here to help the schools make it happen. This will then allow time for the Board to re-evaluate the latest COVID-19 data and develop guidelines for when inside meals could be safe to resume.

Thank you for considering this request and appreciating the very difficult position we as parents are in right now.

Stay safe,
Deborah Baron

Hello Dr. Hamlett and the School Board,

Thank you for convening this special meeting today, August 19th, to discuss a possible virtual option. The combination of the Delta variant running through our communities and the majority of the K-8 population not yet having access to any of the COVID vaccines means that this school year will continue to be challenging. We are the parents of a rising 4th grader at Estes Hills Elementary and a rising 6th grader at Phillips Middle School. We have been thankful for the leadership and communication from our school administrators (in particular from Estes Hills Elementary Principal Pamela McCann). However, we remain very concerned about the health, safety, and well-being of our kids. We implore the district to make a virtual option available for all K-8 grades, at least until this population has access to a COVID vaccine.

Some of our concerns that remain about this school year include:

1. The extent to which **substitute teachers** will be made aware of and will strictly follow the mask mandate, lunch protocols, etc. Since teachers will be making the call about whether to eat lunch outside, "weather permitting," we are concerned that substitute teachers may not be fully prepared to respond to the current guidelines.

2. **Lunch time**. We are very concerned about the safety of our kids during lunch. We will likely experience several more hot or stormy days once the school year begins, and we fear that on those days when lunch is eaten inside that this will sharply increase the risk of COVID outbreaks.

3. **Mask breaks**. Another potential area of concern is the allowance of mask breaks. Will teachers be uniformly informed about how/when to authorize these, so that kids are taking off their masks only once outside and several feet away from other students?

4. **Contact tracing**. What are the specific protocols for this? Will all kids in the household need to quarantine? For example, if a family has more than one child in CHCCS schools, one of them is quarantining, do the protocols require that the other kid in that same household (but different class) enter into quarantine as well? Contact tracing is further complicated by the fact that in some grades (5th and Middle schoolers) will be moving from classroom to classroom throughout the day. These aspects of the safety protocols have not been adequately addressed.

5. **Vaccination mandates**. We disagree with the state's refusal to implement a vaccine mandate for all school teachers and staff, as well as the inability of parents to ask about a teacher's vaccination status. This increases the risk of community spread and unnecessarily endangers our children. Being up to date on vaccines has long been an expectation of both children and teachers in the school environment, and it does not make sense to leave parents in the dark. We understand that this is beyond your control and authority, but have included this concern here because it factors into our strong preference for a virtual option.

A virtual option does not need to come at the expense of a quality education, as some parents have expressed. There are creative (if imperfect) solutions to providing a virtual option that keeps everyone safe(r) while we wait for a vaccine for kids. Without a virtual option, we are left with crossing our fingers and hoping for the best. We ask you to consider implementing a virtual option for K-8, just as our neighboring school districts in other counties have done.

Sincerely,
Camille and Nico Gourdet

I am writing to request two policy changes that will help keep our kids safe. First, please make it district policy that lunches are eaten outside unless it is raining. Please remove it from teacher discretion. I know that our teachers are amazing, but kids are likely going to prefer eating in classrooms and I think it would be easier and SAFER for everyone if we just removed the option. With the Delta variant it is incredibly clear that eating indoors is not a safe option.

Second, many parents have no option but to send their children on the bus. With 2-3 to a row we are clearly abandoning social distancing. I understand that there is little we can do about that, but we can require buses to have open windows unless it is raining. That would at least let air circulate and probably reduce the number of children exposed if someone on the bus has COVID.

Thank you for your service in these trying times. But please let's do everything we can to make our kids safer.

Whitney Afonso

A few comments/questions on the Alternative Learning proposal submitted to the Board for review and consideration tonight...

- The Superintendent's proposal states 275 of 820 responses (approximately 33%) to her August 6th community survey inquired about an alternative learning plan for K-8. The survey appears to have been sent to a much broader population than just K-8 families. So it may very well be that a significantly higher percentage of K-8 families are considering or are interested in alternative learning options for their children.

- Covid cases remain on the rise, concerns about the waning efficacy of vaccines are growing, and anecdotal evidence of Covid outbreaks in school systems already in session are in the news. All this information will inform parent decisions on whether to send their children to in-person learning.

- The Superintendent's alternative learning plan seems to rely heavily on educational technology. Unlike high school and even middle school students, K-5 students typically require more support "to make the technology work". Who is going to support the technology requirements of potentially one-third of our K-8 students under this plan?

- School ITFs seem the natural group to take on this responsibility at each of their schools. But whether the ITFs will support or not, the plan should specify...

- (1) who will be responsible for providing this technology support, particularly during the after school hours, and...

- (2) that those individuals providing this technology "extra duty" will be compensated just as the other "extra duty" teachers and staff supporting the plan.

Many thanks for taking the time to think through all these issues in order to arrive at a workable plan!

Craig

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I want to thank the Board and CHCCS staff for all of their efforts. I think the recommendation is well thought out and I hope that it succeeds.

My primary concern is that the recommended plan does not fully consider the burdens placed on teachers and staff at the elementary school level. "Extra duty" CHCCS teachers, who will already be providing in-person instruction, will now have the additional burden of planning asynchronous lessons and preparing online content. While I appreciate that CHCCS intends to offer additional pay to these teachers, I am not sure there will be a sufficient number of teachers willing to effectively double their workload at the level of compensation offered. "Extra duty" pay should be higher if at all possible.

Furthermore, even teachers and support staff who do not sign up for "extra duty" will still be required to prepare asynchronous activities and lessons for students absent due to isolation or quarantine requirements under this plan. In light of the fact that any symptoms of illness will trigger an isolation period, cameras will quickly become a fixture in all classrooms. CHCCS should recognize all its teachers for their extraordinary efforts, and even those teachers who do not sign up for "extra duty" should receive some form of bonus compensation for the additional work.

While I am glad to have polycams and possibly a microphone on the teacher for when students must be absent, my hope would be that teachers in the classroom will not be required to stand in a fixed place and teach in a manner similar to last year's instructional activity (unless the entire class has to go fully remote). This is based on my opinion that CHCCS must not sacrifice the quality of its in-person instruction to accommodate remote learning – particularly when other remote learning options are available to the district.

Like every parent in the district, I want to keep my children as safe as possible while providing them with as much education benefit as possible. Some will conclude that the safest option is to keep their children at home and participate in 100% virtual learning. While this is possible for some, it is not feasible for all families. It is also untenable for our teachers to operate as they did last year, but with a full-time instructional load. To operate as we did last year would be to further leave behind the students who most need in-person instruction.

For this reason, I believe CHCCS should quickly tally teacher input to determine if it is possible to staff "extra duty" at the recommended levels. If there is not sufficient interest, CHCCS should reconsider contracting with a company that offers an online school. Otherwise, CHCCS will find itself in the position of having to hire new, online-only, "extra duty" teachers who are not connected to CHCCS.

As outlined by the Board, the major downside to contracting with a third-party company is that most communication with students would take place via electronic means (email, text, video chat) and that there would be no connection to the CHCCS school. But under the recommended plan, teacher interaction will already be via electronic means for those students selecting the remote option. If the concern is the connection to CHCCS, which is valuable, then perhaps this could be mitigated by allowing those students to virtually attend classroom morning meetings, participate in rallies with the principal, and perhaps even be allowed to stream CHCCS classroom instruction with the teachers to whom the student was originally assigned as a supplement.

I hope the recommended plan works as adopted, but I ask that you please reconsider this plan in the event that teacher interest is not there.

Thank you again for all your outstanding efforts.

Jim Baker

Carrboro NC

Dear Members of the Board,

Thank you for working diligently to ensure the safety of our children and to consider the concerns of the parents. Like many families, we have become increasingly worried about the incoming scientific reports about the contagiousness of the Delta variant, increased case numbers and hospitalizations including among kids[1], ICU capacities filling up in Chapel Hill and neighboring areas[2], and staggering rates (1 in 4 cases) of long-term COVID symptoms [3]. You may have read that UNC faculty have signed a petition[4] asking for a delayed opening at UNC due to the danger of outbreaks (even though college students are eligible for the vaccine). Reports suggest that unvaccinated people remain five times more likely to become infected than people who are vaccinated, and 25 times more likely to be hospitalized[5]. We are concerned about our ability to keep children safe in a school environment, especially since elementary school children are not yet eligible for a vaccine.

To that end, we would strongly prefer the option of virtual delivery of the school material at the elementary school level. Even with increased precautions, outbreaks at our schools are imminent and long-term repercussions for unvaccinated kids are unknown. Some families may feel that the social benefits outweigh the health risks or may not have the means to keep their kids learning at home for long stretches. We fully support their ability to go back to in-person schooling. We feel the opposite – we would rather keep our child safe and are willing to forgo the social benefits of school for a little longer, until vaccines are available for their age group. There is currently no option for families like us. Virtual delivery would help us keep kids safe. A virtual option would also help our schools by reducing the number of students in in-person classes. Once kids under 12 are eligible and vaccinated, the chances of an outbreak would be much lower, and the consequences would be much more manageable. At that point, we would be excited to rejoin in-person schooling.

For students attending in person, it will be critical to ensure safety during breakfast, snack and lunch times, when children need to take off their masks. We have not been able to receive clear and decisive

information about how these times will be managed in practice. We cannot be casual about this, as variations among schools and teachers will put all at risk. How can we ensure that masks come off only when students are outdoors? What precautions are being taken to implement this in practice? Are teachers receiving enough up-to-date and evidence-based training about the contagion of the Delta variant and its consequences? How can we, as parents, support schools such that indoor activities are strictly masked, no exceptions?

Finally, we find ourselves in a situation where our child is placed in a classroom with a substitute teacher due to an increase in enrollments and a delay in hiring new teachers. We would appreciate information on the rates of vaccination among substitute teachers.

Thank you for considering,

Isin Guler

[1]

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/children-hospitalized-with-covid-19-us-hits-record-number-2021-08-14/>

[2] <https://www.newsobserver.com/news/coronavirus/article253468319.html>

[3]

<https://health.ucdavis.edu/health-news/newsroom/studies-show-long-haul-covid-19-afflicts-1-in-4-covid-19-patients-regardless-of-severity/2021/03>

[4]

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/10xtD0jxGiwHso6VLPiCraLeO1pL5qBcN2DpVYhEm5NA/edit>

[5]

<https://www.ucsf.edu/news/2021/08/421171/how-dangerous-delta-variant-heres-what-science-says>

First, thank you for your service and all your hard work to help our children navigate these incredibly difficult times. As a parent of a 3rd grader and rising kindergartner, I want to add my voice to those who believe that we must be even more diligent than last spring due to the new Delta variant. As I expressed to Dr. Hamlett, I am in favor of a virtual academy until our children are fully vaccinated. Recognizing that may be impossible to establish at this point, I strongly encourage the board to set directives that (1) all meals (breakfasts, lunches, snacks), as well as all “mask breaks” will be held outdoors unless weather conditions absolutely prohibit it; and (2) that classrooms be set up and run to allow for the maximum social distancing possible. My husband and I are more than happy to help with supplies or even periodic meal supervision if that is what is necessary to keep our students safe. Finally, I’m wondering if we could get some clarification on how COVID-related absences will be treated. I know that some potential exposures at school may force our children to quarantine, but what if there is an exposure outside of school and our children have to quarantine – how will that be treated in terms of

absences and will the children have sufficient access to materials/lessons to allow them to keep up academically?

Thank you, again, for being willing to adapt to changing circumstances as necessary.

Best,
Kara Millonzi

Hi -

Would it be possible to post the public comments *prior* to tonight's meeting?

Thank you so much,
Dr. Nyssa Rayne

The best way to protect kids from Covid right now is to mandate teacher vaccinations. We have a tool - vaccines - that dramatically reduces the chances a person will get Covid and bring it to their place of work. Why are we putting our unvaccinated children under 12 who cannot protect themselves with a vaccine at further risk of Covid by not requiring CHCCS staff to be vaccinated? It makes no sense. If the schools were primarily concerned with student well-being, they would mandate this immediately. Kids have always needed standard immunizations to attend public school (against MMR, Chicken Pocks, etc), why not require teachers to do the same?

Natasha Goldstein
Two children at Morris Grove Elementary School

Dear Members of the Board,

Thank you for the work you do for our children. I am writing to urge you to adopt a virtual learning option for all students in the district for the start of the school year. My son is in high school so has the option of the Virtual Learning Academy, but students have to commit to the entire year of virtual learning. I want my son to have in-person learning this year for all the benefits it entails, but we can't do that safely right now with COVID's Delta variant. I know the kids will be masked in school, but as my husband just discovered this morning while touring my son's high school, the kids will not be able to socially distance in the classroom. It's impossible to have students remain 6 feet apart given the size of the rooms, the number of desks, and the number of students.

I am a faculty member at UNC. Recently the faculty developed a letter urging UNC's administration to make classes virtual for the first 4-6 weeks (<https://tinyurl.com/ten4v8t>). That letter currently has over 500 faculty signatures. Below I've pasted an excerpt from the letter that is also directly relevant to the issue of sending our children back to K-12 school:

New U.S. cases of COVID-19 have risen to more than 129,000 cases per day. This is "the highest average since early February." In North Carolina, more than 2,400 people are currently hospitalized with COVID-19. Breakthrough cases are increasing. Our ICUs are full or almost full. Last fall, the number of hospitalizations from COVID-19 was used as one metric to move teaching online. *Rushing back to the classroom this week puts us all at risk.*

As we learned from the past two semesters, online teaching, although not always optimal, can work well. Clearly, we can move to remote classes for the next 4-6 weeks until the more transmissible Delta variant surge is brought under control.

UNC Hospital infectious disease physician Dr. David Wohl said on August 13, "We're in trouble. We are going to have a very bumpy few weeks.... It's only going to get worse. We are backsliding."

Please help our children and our community by giving all children an option for virtual learning for the start of school. Again, while I appreciate the Virtual Learning Academy offered for high school students, I want to be able to send my child to in-person instruction this academic year, but only when it is safe to do so.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jean Cadigan

Good afternoon board and parents,

Today, I am writing to you anonymously as a teacher in the district. This week, we returned to buildings to prepare to welcome students back next week. We have been in staff meetings almost daily, some days all day long, mostly in person, and with minimal distancing. The real concern this week, however, has been the lack of proper mask usage. We know that part of leadership is leading by example - do as I do. This week, some members of administration have been extremely relaxed with mask usage - pulling it down during meetings (when not presenting) and pulling it down when leading meetings, to "help us hear better" (rather than using a microphone). This has led to staff behavior mimicking this relaxed usage, as it is modeled as being okay. This includes going into hallways unmasked, eating indoors together,

and pulling masks down at meetings/unmasking to speak. If this is the precedent that is set, it is a fair assumption that masks will be pulled down to speak in classrooms as well - which will let students think it is okay. This is NOT okay, and this is NOT safe. I urge you to push for more strict mask usage, and more strict mask enforcement. Board, I ask that you make this a priority - make student and staff safety a priority.

Additionally, I ask that ALL meals be served outdoors. Scroggs PTA did a wonderful job supporting Mrs. Epp's mission to make this possible. All schools should be on this page - making outdoor coverings a priority to ensure students can eat outside, rain or shine, for all meals - not just lunch, and not just some classes.

Thank you.

Good after noon, Please I would like for my son (in 10th Grade) to be able to do remote learning through the east chapel hill high school and NOT through the ?Virtual High School Academy? especially with this delta variant I do not feel safe sending my son to school, and i know many, many other parents who feel the exact same way as i do. And with the delta variant, many other schools throughout the country are re-closing and the covid cases are only rising as-well (and in our orange county too.) So please let our children in High school be able to do remote learning (without having to be enrolled within the Virtual High School Academy) for their own safety please and the anxiety everyday of thinking of our kids in High School (and themselves) catching this deadly virus.

We are smarter than to learn on our own mistakes, we need to only look south and west of us to see that in person learning this year is a huge, unnecessary, risk. Which inevitably leads to remote learning either way.

Why would any of you want to have our state in competition with the likes of:

Florida (over 8000 students (one district) under quarantine, 3 days in to the school year)

Texas (Houston, specifically) has thousands of active cases amongst students the rest of the state is going remote.

Alabama is reporting over 5000 cases (it's been under a week!)

There is not enough space in our schools for minimal safe distancing!

Kids will not keep to themselves or keep their masks on, if you think they will, you have not worked with, or experienced children and should resign from a post that is responsible for their well being.

Why would you put our already overworked, underpaid educators and support staff at more risk?

Seriously, this is one of the best educated, smartest school districts in this state! Live up to your reputation, go full remote now.

Please don't wait till kids are in the hospital or in isolation at home to do this.

We can get ahead of this and save our children the psychological trauma of having to quarantine, to come in to a classroom, only to be sent home again days later. Think of the impact! Be proactive rather than reactive. There is still time! Please!

mshevelkin@gmail.com

Dear school board,

Thank you for your stamina and your dedication to our community.

I am writing about a single issue with a suggested solution - lunch. This is our highest exposure risk time in the day - masks off, kids indoors.

I would like to propose two actions aimed at keeping lunch safe while Delta risk is high:

1. Lunch outdoors during all weather conditions that can be supported at the school, based on covers/canopies that the district or school community puts in place. Let's do all we can to make this comfortable.

2. For weather conditions that do not support lunch outdoors, please allow these days to be optionally shortened instructional days where parents can choose to pick up their children before lunch. For children that remain at the school based on need or family preference, this reduces the population eating indoors and lowers the exposure risk. Those in-school children can spread out more for lunch indoors. For children that go home, this allows that departure to be predictable and supported by the school.

Thank you,
Gayle Hagler

TO OUR BOARD MEMBERS

Please show us the scientific DATA and the legal authority you used to vote on requiring students to be either weekly tested or fully vaccinated to participate in after school activities vs in school activities?

Why does an after school activity suddenly require a vaccine or testing? How is that activity any different from the same students riding the bus together, sitting in class all day together, having lunch together??? I can't find any data to support this decision. Please point to the science that you used to vote for this mandate.

Children in this district have spent the ENTIRE summer OUTSIDE at YMCA camps, at neighborhood playgrounds, in the community pools - without masks, many without vaccines. **Out of 72 million children in America, less than 375 children have died from Covid since March of 2020** as infections are rarely fatal with just .01 percent resulting in death. Covid is not killing our kids.[\(data\)](#) Suicide is killing them. Drug overdoses are killing them. Homicides are killing them in far greater numbers than Covid. Sports and extracurriculars are critical after a year of lockdowns.

Again, show us the scientific data and the legal argument that our children must be vaccinated or subjected to testing in order to participate in after school activities, but not in school activities.

Sincerely,
A parent of kids ages 6, 12, 14 & 16

michelle bush

As a mother of a 6-year-old at CHCCS, I am asking you to vote to adopt a virtual option for children who cannot be vaccinated. These layers of protection - masking, vaccination, distance, air filtration - are crucial, now more than ever because of the exponential transmission of the Delta variant. To echo the sentiments of many commenters here: This is not last year's virus. And last year, we had a virtual option as one of the layers of protection. I recognize that the hybrid model was not viable for many reasons. This is why other districts in our area adopted the virtual academy model - for all ages - early.

I realize that many people do not have the option to keep their child home for the virtual option. This is why I think it is so important to offer it as an *option.* Those of us who can make it work will do so, reducing the capacity in the classrooms to ensure distancing can take place.

None of this is ideal. I recognize the social/emotional impacts. There is also a light at the end of the tunnel (vaccination for ages 12 & under) if we can just follow this layered safety approach and see it through.

Thank you.

Children should not have their mortality reinforced on a daily basis. Yet, every student who goes into school right now is going to be challenged with that reality. While social interaction is an integral part of the human experience, no one seems to be discussing the psychological harm that may arise from children being forced to recognize their vulnerabilities at such a young age. This is the time when young children should believe in magic and their own invincibility, not being confronted with an invisible danger that may not only cause immediate illness, but potentially long-lasting harm in the form of “long COVID.” Indeed, the cognitive damage some children have suffered is terrifying. See Pam Belluck, ‘This Is Really Scary’: Kids Struggle With Long Covid, New York Times, August 8, 2021, found at <https://nyti.ms/3srnb9m>.

Against that backdrop, and with vaccinations potentially only weeks away--and certainly available sometime this fall--why should parents who have diligently kept their children protected for the past seventeen months be forced to yield to in-person learning when the situation has become the most dire for children during the entirety of that period?

It is disheartening to see this Board holding a meeting on the topic of virtual learning this late in the game. Once again, I feel that this Board is failing our community. Were this Board seriously considering an online option, it would not have waited until two business days before school begins to address the topic. The dangers of the Delta variant to children have been known for weeks. Many governments and businesses already reacted to the change in circumstance, certainly this Board had notice of the dire situation weeks ago.

Granted, not every parent has the option to keep their child home, and others do not wish to, but some do and should have that option. Moreover, each parent should have the right to make the choices that are best for their family, so long as those choices do not put others in danger. CHCCS is fortunate to exist in a community with significant taxes that afford this school system opportunities beyond those of most. One of the things that this school system can certainly afford is a virtual academy for all grades. As for the parents who have complained about how my child’s online learning might affect their child’s in-person learning, the complaint not only creates the kind of divisiveness that too many people enjoy furthering nowadays, it is short sighted. For every student who stays at home, there is that much more space for the in-person attendees to socially distance. It is a gift that should be embraced.

For those parents who want and are able to keep their children at home, any model of online learning would be appreciated, no matter how imperfect. It is my hope that this school board will meet the moment and provide an online option for the significant number of people who clearly want one.

Sincerely yours,

Brian Pomerantz

I just want to ask that we please not operate our school district out of headline grabbing fear. There certainly are instances where children are getting sick with COVID, but we need to be aware that there is very likely more to the story. Many of those children are likely living in homes where the adults are not vaccinated, are not wearing masks and are not practicing any safe behaviors with regards to COVID. It is highly unlikely that the children caught or spread the virus while at school wearing a mask and practicing safety precautions at school.

The trauma to our kids last year was undeniable. Let's take every step we can to keep our kids in school and safe. I want to thank the Board for the wonderful work done so far and to ask them to not hesitate to reach out to our community with needs for any further safety measures. I do think lunchtime is an area that needs additional scrutiny as far as safety. Even though it is not ideal, the short lunch eaten at desks that are socially distanced with no talking was a safe option in the spring. That could be implemented again at least until the delta variant is under control. Or the parent community could work to raise funds for every school to have tents or other additional outside dining options. I know I may be in the minority, but I would be open to either of those options.

My primary ask is to please work to find ways to keep our kids in school, in person, 5 days a week. They have been counting on it and the trauma imposed last year was material. Let's work to find a way to avoid that situation again.

Dear Board members & Dr. Hamlett,

First of all, THANK YOU for setting up the plan to provide weekly in-school testing, not just for athletes but also for the K-8 kids. This is a game-changer and will help prevent the spread of COVID19 in classrooms and in our community. I truly hope all families will sign up for this.

Given all of the comments here requesting a remote option for K-8, I want to share the opinion that CHCCS should continue to put its focus on providing high quality in-person learning.

For those of you wanting a virtual option for your child, a quick Google search gives you lots of options, including the free NC Virtual Academy for both K-8 and 9-12: <https://ncva.k12.com/how-it-works/k-8.html>. Unfortunately CHCCS does not have the resources and staffing to provide both in-person and virtual learning. Carrboro Elementary lost 13 educators last year! It's already a struggle to find enough staff to fill existing positions much less start up a virtual learning option with new staff.

Orange County is highly vaccinated and the precautions the school is putting in place are adequate. Dr. Danny Benjamin, of the ABC Science Collaborative, said in today's lunch and learn that children are SAFER at school than in their communities and that children do not need to wear KN95 masks. Chapel Hill is NOT Florida or Texas. I recommend listening to this webinar they did today: <https://www.chccs.org/parentwebinars>

There are many comments here about why the district has not provided strong guidance and resources for outdoor learning and eating, tents, etc. I echo that frustration. Many of us have been beating this drum since the beginning of the pandemic. Fortunately, the strong parent community at Carrboro Elementary made this happen last spring with event tents and even a grant-funded Outdoor Classroom. Have a look at this awesome video to learn more about it: <https://youtu.be/RjQvFaX83lI>.

Thank you,
Kristen Stolka

I want to add my voice to the chorus that outdoor lunch "when feasible" isn't good enough. You need to mandate outdoor lunch, provide specific guidelines for when indoor lunch would be necessary and provide the schools with the environments they need to make that happen. Parents / PTAs shouldn't carry the burden of providing tents and supplies to some schools and not others. Teachers shouldn't be allowed to decide class by class if they are eating inside or outside on any given day.

Also, very concerned about the proposal that teachers would use their afternoons to teach an additional class of remote students. You're only talking about compensating them for an additional 12 - 15 hours of work. Surely you know that there is far more time involved than the time they spend on live instruction? Teachers had a hard time keeping up with virtual assignments and providing feedback in a timely manner last year and they only had 1 class of students to teach. Teaching one group of students is a full-time job. How is a teacher supposed to teach two?

Parent of elementary student
J Kohn

I know there have been prior comments on the outdoor lunch issue and that many parents who have not commented are concerned about this issue as well. I have been very pleased to see the board and the district's actions to date on COVID prevention measures such as masking, and most recently the offer of testing for all students.

However, the lack of clarity around how outdoor lunch will be implemented, and that it seems it may be at the discretion of the school and/or teacher, is in my opinion the weak link in the

district's overall efforts to keep our children safe. All the effort to keep kids masked during the day seems for naught if they could be spending 15 minutes per day unmasked and indoors on a regular basis with an unknown number of children while they eat lunch. Given how highly contagious Delta is, this is more than enough time to have COVID spread easily among students.

I would like to see a commitment from the district to mandate outdoor lunch and snack except in cases of inclement weather. I would also feel more comfortable if there were a commitment to have lunch in the classroom when weather does not permit outdoor eating, in order to minimize exposure between classes.

I know that funds and logistics make outdoor lunch/snack challenging, but I have seen no coordinated call from the district for support with funds or volunteer time to make outdoor lunch more feasible, and I know many parents would be happy to contribute on both fronts.

Please help close this gap in the district's otherwise strong safety procedures to ensure that we are doing everything possible to minimize the spread of COVID.

Thank you,

Cathy Wirth

Parent to incoming K students at Carrboro Elementary School

I am impressed by the efforts that CHCCS is making for layered protections for students, including the mask mandate, HEPA filtration, ventilation, weekly screening test availability for all students, and outdoor meals. I only wish that a vaccine mandate was in place for teachers and staff. I also appreciate that the proposed virtual K-8 will not interfere with full in-person instruction!

Two thoughts for our students returning in-person:

- The virus doesn't care if it's lunch vs breakfast or snack, and I know my child enjoys all three of those meals at school! Can we arrange for all meals, not just lunch, to be outdoors? I know that lunch was outdoors in the spring with towels to sit on, and it sounds like it went just fine.
- The quality of masks matters, and the cotton masks provided by the schools last spring are not adequate. Please educate parents on higher quality options, and more importantly, also provide masks for families that are not able to access them. There are a number of resources out there for finding bulk KF94 kids masks; see @masknerd on Twitter for reliable information. Two reliable websites for purchasing are behealthyusa.net and kollechteusa.com. Amazon is full of knockoffs and should be avoided.

Many thanks,
Ruth Williams

Good afternoon,

I'm writing to express my concern about reopening public schools amidst the surge and the Delta Variant. We know this is a highly transmissible and contagious version of Covid and that are young children especially those ages 5 to 11, cannot be vaccinated. I would make a plea to the board to strongly consider a virtual option that works cooperatively with their current school rather than a separate Academy. We don't want to leave our school, we just want to feel well supported during this unprecedented and dangerous time. This virtual option I would hope would be short term until children can be vaccinated and/or the current Delta surge declines to more reasonable numbers of communicable spread.

If this isn't feasible (which it is! We have done this already) I would make a plea that vaccination be mandatory for all eligible teachers and staff. We can mandate vaccines in our hospitals, clinics and in the private sector and we should do so for those most near our children.

I understand not all families can do a virtual option. But keep in mind a virtual option for those that could do it in the short order would also better protect those children in school as well as the teachers and staff.

Thank you for considering,

Brittain

I'm writing to express my disappointment that we are not starting the year with hybrid learning as an option while the Delta variant is steadily increasing in our county and in NC as a whole.

I have two children at Estes Hills (3rd & K) and do not want to remove them from their school, but at the same time don't see how sending my unvaccinated children back into the classroom at this point in time is safe. The Delta variant affects kids much more than the original strain, cases are on the rise, and the current case numbers are equivalent to this past February when schools were remote only.

Are there any metrics in place to determine when to offer Hybrid learning or switch to remote learning? How is that decision made?

Please consider offering hybrid learning during the current Delta wave and allow children under 12 to remain hybrid until they are fully vaccinated.

Thanks for your consideration,

Evan Erickson

Dear Board and administration,

Thank you so much for working hard on developing the remote learning plan. I have two questions. If the schools have to close, will the remote and in-person cohorts be joined? Also, do you have guidelines/metrics for closing schools or is that completely dependent on the state?

Thank you,
Laura Farnan

Dear Board, I believe the state of NC offers a virtual academy so that should suffice for the people that don't want to come to in person school. Chapel Hill and Orange County are already in enough debt as it is and there is no need to increase the budget. If you do proceed with the virtual academy, I can guarantee the NEA and NAACP already have the teachers picked out to make those big salaries sucking out more money out of the strained system.

Vaccines are not needed for kids and every study and statistic supports this. Covid is less harmful to kids than even the viruses like RSV that make up the common cold. In fact, given recent studies that I can't share because I am privy to the prelim results, it is very questionable whether any of the current Covid vaccines will actually get full FDA approval. The side affects are much greater than the initial studies showed and the efficacy of the drugs even after a few months is close to zero, or in some cases for certain age groups actually a negative efficacy.

To date, there have been 361 deaths (annual rate of 250) from Covid for the ages group of 0 to 17 in roughly the last 18 months since the start of the pandemic (per CDC). There are typically 500 deaths along for the flu per year in the USA for the 0 to 17 age group. If you truly want to focus on mental health, there are about 500 deaths of suicide per year for the 0 to 17 age group, with our board and many school boards shutting down schools and activities in 2020 and making kids wear masks, I expect the 2020 and 2021 suicides for 0 to 17 year olds to spike. That blame rests on the shoulders of the NEA and its school board grim reapers all through the USA, and here in Chapel Hill.

It is time to get back to normal like much of the world and country already has and stop playing games with data and stats and stop sponsoring small groups with big voices to disrupt society. Chapel Hill is a place of harmony and peace and you are doing everything

to destroy that. If you want to dismantle our system here, I just don't think that is a pleasant thing to do. Instead of dismantling a system that you don't like, please take the self initiative to start your own system where you please. There are hundreds of millions of dollars with your friends at the NEA to help you out and there is plenty of cheap land for you to build what you want where you want instead of trying to hijack Chapel Hill.

Dr. Tom Whalton

Dear board members,

I beg you to save our children and offer virtual learning option at our schools. This will help to decrease crowding for those children who will attend in person and provide virtual option for those who can't attend in-person at this time.

Delta is different.

Please, do not push our daughter out of her school in her senior year.

Thank you,

Mother of 12th grader at CHS.

<https://www.marketwatch.com/story/highly-contagious-delta-variant-and-record-child-hospitalizations-raise-fear-as-u-s-schools-reopen-01629398916?siteid=yhoof2>

Nancy Kaesemeyer MD

Last year there was a virtual learning option. This year we have been told our daughter, a senior, who has medical conditions preventing in person attendance, has to change schools to continue virtual online classes in order to graduate..

As you can imagine we are outraged about this. This last minute decision will negatively affect our child.

We are requesting a virtual option for education at Carrboro High School so she can be taught by

her usual teachers, with whom she is familiar, and graduate from her school with her peers.

Our children have suffered enough during this pandemic. We do not need to traumatize them further,

especially during their final year of school when they are stressed enough with college applications.

Finally, our question: this wave of infection is nowhere near its predicted peak..As a result of increasing

infections there will likely be a need to provide online instruction for those who are sick and quarantined.

So, why not be prepared and offer it now?

Wayne Kaesemeyer MD

The Research Triangle of North Carolina, comprised of Durham, Raleigh, and Chapel Hill prides itself on being the forefront of technology and scientific breakthrough. Yet, in a community full of scientists and brilliant minds, I am in awe of the lack of science-backed policies being pursued by our School Board and local public school officials.

I am a parent of two children: a rising Kindergarten student in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro School system and a 3-year-old enrolled in daycare. Due to the Orange County mask mandate and the Chapel Hill-Carrboro School policy, both of my children are required to wear masks for the entirety of the day. My 3-year-old receives a break from the mask during nap, recess, and meals. My Kindergartener is currently required to wear a mask at all times, except for meals, to include outdoor recess.

There is little scientific evidence supporting the efficacy of masking among children. However, there is a full body of research evidence on the health hazards of children wearing masks for an extended period of time. The damage schools are currently inflicting on our children is potentially irreversible and must stop immediately.

A recent article published in the Wall Street Journal written by Dr. Marty Makary, a professor at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine and Dr. Cody Messner, Chief of Pediatric Infectious Diseases at Tufts Children's Hospital, explains several health concerns of masking our children. As noted by Dr. Makary and Dr. Messner, not only do masks distract from learning, but *"by increasing airway resistance during exhalation, masks can lead to increased levels of carbon dioxide in the blood. And masks can be vectors of pathogens if they become moist or are used for too long."*^[1] Masking our children will have long term impacts on their immune systems. As children grow, exposure to some viruses and bacteria is essential to building a responsive and healthy immune system, but we have inhibited all normal exposures through continued isolation and face coverings. At some point, life will return to normal, and our children will be left with weakened immune systems unable to fight off less vigorous threats.

Allowing our children to breathe is certainly the top priority, but the psychological and physiological effects of masking cannot be ignored. The emotional connections formed through evaluating facial expression are imperative to their growth and development. What a disservice to our children who have already been stripped of the ability to form relationships with their peers, teachers, and others throughout the last year and a half, by continuing to deprive them of fully engaging with other human beings today.

We can all agree, the purpose of school is to educate the younger generation. What kind of education are we providing for our children by pursuing policies that create barriers to learning? Somehow, we are expecting them to discern muffled speech without any contextual facial cues or seeing the mouth's formation of words. As adults, we can all attest to the difficulty we have hearing garbled speech through masks, building relationships through a computer screen, engaging with co-workers, family members, and others through various filters. We are placing an unnecessary burden on our children by not eliminating as many of those barriers to learning as possible.

Eighteen months of evidence proves COVID-19 is not a risk to my children. Currently, Orange County, N.C. has a 79% vaccination rate. Orange County has arguably reached herd immunity. If vaccinating the adults is by and large the greatest way to keep children safe, we have reached that goal. Vaccines are now available to all of those 12 and up and the death rate in our community is the lowest it has been since the beginning of the pandemic. As parents, we should breathe a sigh of relief that COVID-19, statistically speaking, has essentially no long-term impact or risk to younger children. With ~330 deaths nation-wide, associated with COVID-19 for children under 18, COVID-19 does not rank anywhere near the top of causes of death among our children. We take a greater risk with our children's lives by driving them in cars, allowing them to ride bikes, and swim in pools/lakes every day. Yet, we've deemed those risks as acceptable and schools without masks, unacceptable.

At the height of COVID-19 infection and deaths, the risk of transmission outdoors was, and still is, virtually non-existent. The CDC has admitted that it miscalculated and exaggerated the risk of outdoor COVID-19 transmission and has since corrected the original estimated outdoor transmission percentage from 10% of cases to 1% of cases.[1] In fact, many experts argue the 1% figure is inflated and the percentage of cases transmitted outdoors is likely even lower. As of 18 August, there have been 9,314 total COVID-19 cases in all of Orange County. Of those 9,314 cases, 1,125 cases have been among children (17 and under). The number of cases for children ages 9 and under is 498.[2] Of the 498 cases, there is no evidence of a single outdoor transmission. What definitive scientific explanation defends the need for my kindergartner to wear a mask during outdoor recess?

Dr. Zimmerman and Dr. Benjamin, of Duke University, recently published a study supporting masking in schools. I understand this study is one of the driving forces for continued masking among our students. However, many have criticized Dr. Zimmerman and Dr. Benjamin's study because it lacked a control comparison. All schools in session last year, in the state of North Carolina, required masking. You cannot state masks slowed the spread of COVID compared to schools without mask mandates when you have no control to which to compare your study.[3] While North Carolina schools did require mask mandates, many Florida schools did not and operated without any significant explosion of cases during the 20-21 school year.

I implore you to review mask policies for children in Europe. Even among countries with multiple lockdowns, common sense was applied to masking for children. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control does not recommend masking for children under 12, as children have a lower tolerance for wearing masks for extended periods of time and may fail to use the masks properly.[4] Ireland's Department of Health will not require masks in schools because they "may exacerbate anxiety or breathing difficulties for some students." [1] Switzerland also does not require masks for children under 12.[2] Sweden has never required masks and successfully kept schools open all of last year. [3]

What is the metric that will allow our children to remove their masks? Is it zero COVID-19? We all know that COVID-19, much like the flu, will be with us for the future. Influenza has proven to be an equal statistical threat to our populace, yet we never placed coverings on our children's faces to prevent its spread. Our kids have had to endure an unfair burden from this pandemic. They have been stripped of their innocence and forced into a position of constant fear of a virus.

It is our responsibility to protect our children, physically, mentally, and emotionally. I ask you as members of the school board to reconsider your masking policy based on what the scientific evidence shows us about the damage being done to children when they are required to wear masks. The School Board holds a great responsibility, and you are answerable for the results of the policies you pursue, not just to parents but to the children you are harming.

Let's give our children the tools to be successful, to grow and to develop. Let's allow our children to take off the masks and enjoy the full benefits of barrier-free learning.

Thank you

Shannon Scovel

[1] [The Case Against Masks for Children - WSJ](#)

[2] [CDC Admits That It Miscalculated The Risk Of Outdoor Covid Transmission – JONATHAN TURLEY](#)

- [3] [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) | Orange County, NC \(orangecountync.gov\)](https://www.orangecountync.gov/coronavirus)
- [4] [Opinion | Universal Masking Can Protect Students From Covid - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/01/opinion/coronavirus-schools.html)
- [5] <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/covid-19/questions-answers/questions-answers-school-transmission>
- [6] [Advice to NPHET on face mask use in children \(hiqa.ie\)](https://www.hiqa.ie/en/Advice-to-NPHET-on-face-mask-use-in-children)
- [7] <https://www.bag.admin.ch/bag/en/home/krankheiten/ausbrueche-epidemien-pandemien/aktuelle-ausbrueche-epidemien/novel-cov/masken.html>
- [8] [Open Schools, Covid-19, and Child and Teacher Morbidity in Sweden - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32322222/)
