

2021-0824

I would like to share the reasoning for changing my recommendation to the Board of Trustees from “masks strongly recommended” to masks required for the first six weeks of school.

I understand that most schools in the Flathead plan to return to school this fall with masks optional and strongly recommended. Up until very recently I expected that was what Somers & Lakeside would do also. At our meeting last Tuesday the County Health Officer reported that there has been a significant increase in cases over the past several weeks and they are seeing more cases among children. Flathead County set a new single day record for hospitalizations with 42 people hospitalized with COVID on Tuesday. Yesterday there were 98 new cases of COVID diagnosed, and 40 more people hospitalized. In addition, we have learned that there have been over 168 pediatric cases in Flathead County since July 1, 96 cases were among children between the ages of 4 and 11. Over the course of the pandemic more than 1700 pediatric cases have occurred, with 23 children between birth and 17 hospitalized and 4 ending up in the intensive care unit.

The purpose of our Continuity of Services plan is to keep our students and staff safe and healthy so that we may provide high quality, in-person instruction. We know attending school face-to-face is better for students academically and socially. I would hate to see us have to quarantine large numbers of students or staff, or even be forced to close schools due to COVID. New CDC guidance has added to the definition of close contacts. People who have been within six feet of one another for a cumulative 15 minutes in 24 hours are considered close contacts and would be quarantined. The new guidance states that if both parties are wearing masks the distance is reduced to 3 feet which will reduce the number who may have to quarantine.

The Center for Disease Control, American Academy of Pediatrics, Montana Medical Association, and the Montana Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics all say that children should be wearing masks in school. I believe in medical matters such as preventing the spread of COVID it is prudent to follow the advice of medical experts. In fact, when the CDC and these other organizations recommend requiring masks that becomes a “standard of care” for schools to follow. If we choose to disregard their advice we could expose the district to liability.

The Board of Trustees will review this policy at their September 20 meeting.

Take a [survey](#) regarding masks and remote learning.