

Daily News

Saturday, August 21, 2021

100 Acts of Kindness: Going the extra mile

By [The Daily News Staff](#) | on August 21, 2021

Submitted by the Mid-Michigan District Health Department

As the coronavirus continues to weave its threads through all of our lives, our son-in-law was vaccinated a week ago. He had a bad reaction to the shot, with a fever, chills, a cough and headache. He took naps and went to bed early, each day hoping the after-effect of the vaccination would be gone.

Finally, after a week, my daughter, who's a nurse, suggested he see a doctor. He had bronchitis and possibly COVID, they suggested, and he was tested for the virus. Within 15 minutes, his test came back positive, so he was quarantined, as well as his wife and daughter. He must have been exposed right before his vaccine.

Normally, two weeks of quarantine are inconvenient, but the next day was his 5-year-old daughter's birthday party, which added a layer of complexity. Vaccinated family members were joining for a celebration. Plus, the following day, they were planning an outdoor party with four kindergarten classmates. All of which was canceled. Again.

The year before, little miss had a Zoom birthday at Grandma and Grandpa's house, due to the pandemic. Would she grow up thinking a birthday was a Zoom event?

Meanwhile, Mom and daughter headed off to be tested. Fortunately, both were negative, although still quarantined. So the plan for their time in isolation was dad downstairs, and mom and daughter upstairs. Back home, mom canceled party plans with family and school friends.

Fortunately, super-vaccinated Grandma and Grandpa were able to drop off birthday gifts driving from the other side of the state. Young cousins in Indiana sighed and unloaded the van and canceled their planned visit, as they weren't fully vaccinated.

But Auntie from Indiana got busy online, and ordered an "Instacart" of a few birthday goodies for the little one. They were scheduled to be delivered on Saturday. She spoke with the Instacart employee that morning, and after she explained the situation, the woman was excited to be involved in the special birthday surprises.

Saturday morning, Grandma and Grandpa arrived bearing gifts and take-out lunch. They had a mini-birthday celebration, on Zoom, with Dad joining online from the basement.

Later that day, the Instacart order arrived. The thoughtful clerk had stopped by the Dollar Store and put all the gifts in a "Happy Birthday" bag. It was a small kindness from a stranger, who took time in her busy day to make the drop-off personal, and a thoughtful investment in a little girl's birthday memories.

This is one in a series of "100 Acts of Kindness" stories submitted in conjunction with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department. To submit your own Act of Kindness story, visit MontcalmPrevention.org and click on one of the "100 Acts of Kindness" buttons.

Daily News

Thursday, August 26, 2021

Parents, community members speak out against face masks, vaccines during Greenville school board meeting

By [Cory Smith](#) | on August 26, 2021



Chad Albert of Oakfield Township, top left, expresses concerns during public comment of Monday's special Greenville Public Schools Board of Education meeting in which more than 50 people attended to show support against face mask-wearing, vaccines and mandates related to COVID-19. At this time, Greenville Public Schools does not have any such mandates in place, but is "highly-encouraging" the wearing of masks. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

GREENVILLE — As thousands of students returned to school Monday morning throughout Greenville Public Schools, more than 50 parents and members of the community returned as well, voicing their concerns over face masks and vaccines at a special school board meeting the same evening.

Members of the Greenville Public Schools Board of Education met for a special meeting to hold a workshop session with Michael Rochholz of the Michigan Association of School Boards to discuss and evaluate "committee structures" of the board.

Members of the public also attended the meeting, many of them representing “Stand Up Michigan,” an anti-lockdown group formed in April 2020 that aims to “reclaim and defend the rights and liberties of ‘We The People of Michigan,’” wearing T-shirts to show their support of the organization.

It was the second consecutive school board meeting in which members of Stand Up Michigan were present to voice concerns over face masks, vaccines and the potential for mandates throughout the school district.



Greenville High School senior Alex Bell of Eureka Township expresses her fear of having to potentially wear a face mask during her final year of school during Monday’s special meeting of the Greenville Public Schools Board of Education. Bell said she attended school virtually during her junior year because she has panic attacks if she has to wear a mask. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

Of those in the audience, 13 people chose to speak. Many of their concerns stemmed from an email sent from Superintendent Linda Van Houten to parents at the end of last week at 3:22 p.m. Friday, Aug. 20.

While no school district in Montcalm County — including Greenville — has issued any mandates regarding face masks, Van Houten said a meeting of local superintendents with Dr. Jennifer Morse, the medical director for the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD), brought forth points of concern regarding local COVID-19 cases.

Van Houten said one point of interest from Morse was the rate of infection from COVID-19 is “significantly rising” in Montcalm County, from a level of positivity of 7.8% a week ago to 13.3%, according to the MI Safe Start Map.

“This is a concern for us as a school district,” Van Houten wrote in her email. “In addition, we now know, according to a recent study from the University of Michigan Public Health Department, that it only takes 2-3 hours for an infected student to spread the virus to all of those around them and takes longer for an infection to spread if masks are worn, increasing the protection for all students. Our students need to be in school as much as possible as there would

be nothing more disappointing than having to close our doors and move to distance learning because we do not have enough teachers in the classrooms or students in the school due to quarantining or the spread of COVID.”

Van Houten asked in the third paragraph of her email that, at the recommendation of the school district and the MMDHD that all teachers, staff, students and visitors wear masks. However, she did not go as far as to mandate it — reiterating the current stance of the school district to highly recommending mask-wearing in “asking” people to do so.

“This, along with many other layered mitigation strategies, will make a difference and allow us to stay in person for learning longer,” Van Houten said. “Together we can do the right thing and make this the best year possible.”



Greenville Public Schools Board of Education President Norice Rasmussen, left, listens as Trustee Charlie Mahar shares his concerns over tabling public comment to the end of Monday’s meeting. The decision to move public comment to the end of the meeting, in order to allow a scheduled guest to perform a three-hour workshop with the board first, failed in a 3-3 tie vote. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

In reaction to that email, several parents and community members expressed frustration over the message itself, how it was delivered and the overall direction of the school district at this time regarding COVID-19.

Public Comment

Oakfield Township resident Heath Carew, who has four children who attend Greenville, felt the timing of Van Houten’s communication — at the end of the week after 3 p.m. — was a mistake and that “asking” the community to wear a mask only served to confuse parents and students as to whether a mandate had been put in place three days before the start of the school year.

“I felt like it was backhanded,” he said. “I had at least 10 parents that I know contact me and ask if masks were required or not. I told them absolutely not. They were still confused. One ask I have is, can we get some transparency in these emails? If you are putting a mandate in because the health department is telling you so, tell us that in the subject line of the email, tell us in the first few lines. Don’t tell us five paragraphs in.”

Carew said he felt the email was “pressuring” the public into wearing a mask.

“I think there’s a lot of the people here that feel the same way,” he said.

Carew also criticized the district for following the health department's guidance of promoting vaccines for eligible students, staff and families.



Oakfield Township resident Heath Carew voices objections against recommendations of face masks and encouragement of vaccines during Monday's special meeting of the Greenville Public Schools Board of Education. At this time, Greenville Public Schools does not have any such mandates in place, but is "highly-encouraging" the wearing of masks. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

"I hope the school does not do that," he said. "It is not your job to promote the vaccine to me or my kids. Their health care choices are up to us."

Several other members of the audience, such as Stand Up Montcalm President Steve Mason of Greenville, used their time to criticize the wearing of masks and their effectiveness against the virus in general.

"There's not a mask you've got on that's stopping any kind of virus, period," Mason said. "Everything that you buy, everything you cover up your face with is not doing anything but a facade."

According to the CDC, cloth and surgical masks do not protect a wearer from airborne infection, but they are not entirely ineffective because they prevent the wearer from transmitting infection to others through droplets.

Several other people who spoke expressed frustrations over issues that masks create for children, ranging from respiratory issues to mental anguish. That included Greenville High School senior Alex Bell of Eureka Township, who said she felt forced to attend her junior year of school virtually last school year.

"I have severe anxiety," she said. "When the mask mandates came out, I was unable to wear a mask, which means I was unable to go to school. I could not go to school in person because I would have extreme panic attacks with the

mask on. That forced me to be virtual and that was a big struggle for me to be virtual for the whole year. I missed out on a lot.”

While the board’s policy is not to engage in dialogue or respond to questions and comments from the audience during the meeting, Board President Norice Rasmussen supplied the Daily News with a statement per the newspaper’s request via email following the meeting.

“We all want what is best for all students and are glad that we have different learning opportunities for Greenville Public Schools students, which currently includes in-person learning and our virtual option Legacy Learning,” she said. “For those attending in person, we want to maintain that daily interaction between students and staff as long as safely possible in the COVID environment. We believe that by encouraging people to wear masks and vaccinate we can partner together in our fight against COVID. The district is also engaging in best practices to slow the spread of infectious diseases.”

Rasmussen said Greenville will continue to review trends and statistics on the COVID-19 impact within the community, county and state, along with reviewing data, in continuing to receive advice on CDC recommendations and local health department guidance.

“Greenville Public Schools will continue to do what is best for all students and student achievement,” she said. “Our administrators, teachers and staff are doing a great job working in this difficult and changing environment, concentrating on what is best for students academically, physically, mentally, and socially,” she said. “We appreciate all our stakeholders and their passion for all students. We will take all comments, emails, and conversations from our community into consideration when making decisions.”

Motion to table public comment fails

After the board listened to comments from the first four people to speak Monday, Rasmussen informed the audience that the board intended to table the remainder of public comment until after Rochholz was able to conclude his workshop with the board — which was scheduled on the agenda to be a three-hour workshop.

“We’re going to do our workshop and then we will open it again for public comment, I assume around 9 to 9:15 p.m.,” she said at about 6:25 p.m.

The motion to do so was made by Vice President Kire Wierda and supported by Secretary Ronald Billmeier.

However, Trustee Charlie Mahar took issue with delaying the public comment portion of the meeting.



Stand Up Montcalm President Steve Mason of Greenville speaks at Monday's special meeting of the Greenville Public Schools Board of Education to express his stance against mask-wearing in schools. At this time, Greenville Public Schools does not have any such mandates in place, but is "highly-encouraging" the wearing of masks. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

"There's a lot of people who have come here to speak," he said to standing applause from the audience. "We do have a guest here, his time is important, I believe he traveled a distance to be here, but it does feel a little bit like we are trying to muzzle this crowd. Twenty minutes doesn't seem like a very long time. My opinion is, we could give them more time."

Treasurer Jim Anderson agreed with Mahar and asked how many more cards (handed to the board prior to the meeting by people who wanted to speak) remained. Rasmussen indicated there were five more people who had desired to speak.

"I don't think it's unusual to have citizens comment on the agenda and then the remainder of it at the end," Billmeier countered. "That's common practice."

"We want to get home and get our kids to bed," a woman remarked from the audience.

"Can we just give them a couple more (minutes)?" Mahar asked. "To me, it feels like people are going to feel like they have not had the opportunity to speak."

"I understand exactly what you are saying and we are not intentionally muzzling anybody," Rasmussen said. "It's just, when we put the agenda out, there is nothing about masks on our agenda."

The board then voted on the motion to table public comment, which failed in a 3-3 tie with Billmeier, Wierda and Trustee Jodi Petersen voting “yes” and Anderson, Mahar and Rasmussen voting “no” (Trustee Rocky Hansen was absent).

Mahar then made a motion, with support from Anderson, to limit the remainder of public comment speaking time to three minutes per person for those who chose to speak.

The board briefly discussed limiting each comment to three minutes instead of the board’s current policy of five minutes, as well as limiting the comments to only those who had submitted a comment to the board, but Rasmussen said she did not want to go against board policy or deny anyone else in the audience from having the chance to speak.

In response, Mahar withdrew his motion and public comment proceeded as normal. Public comment continued for an additional 37 minutes with nine people choosing to speak.

Once public comment concluded, Rasmussen reiterated to the public the board would not be making any other decisions or discussing the issue of masks for the remainder of the meeting.

At that point in the meeting, everyone aside from the Daily News reporter left the meeting and the board held its workshop with Rochholz for an additional two hours and four minutes, adjourning at about 9:15 p.m.

Daily News

Saturday, August 28, 2021

100 Acts of Kindness: Planting kindness flowers

Submitted by the Mid-Michigan
District Health Department

Like a snowball, once you start the kindness ball rolling, it gets bigger and bigger.

Not in winter, but in early summer this year, I was trying to think of ways to help my sister, who was undergoing chemotherapy for liver cancer. I was inspired to do some gardening at her cottage near us. With her treatment, they had been unable to “open up” the cottage and the yard and stone flower beds around the house and garage had not been mowed or planted.

Simultaneously, another sister, who also loves to garden, was coming to visit me. We put our heads together and both bought plants for the flower garden.

Meanwhile, I mentioned the project to a neighbor and my aunt, along with a good friend, the day before.

So I started by mowing the yard the evening before my sister was to arrive from the other side of the state. I made a mental list of needed supplies, garden tools, fertilizer and flowers. I bought flats of different flowers: snapdragons, zinnias, begonias, moss roses, impatiens.

In the morning, my sister arrived bright and early with her car trunk filled with more flowers. As we gabbed, I loaded my van with the tools we needed. My sister and I caught up on family

news, including a report on our sibling. Our sister with cancer was wiped out from the treatments and recently had spent a few days in the hospital.

Just then, a car pulled up, and my neighbor stopped by to drop off more flowers for our project. What a thoughtful gesture! We thanked her and got to work preparing to plant.

Next, my aunt drove up. She rolled up her sleeves and helped us distribute the flowers and took them out of the containers while we planted. After a bit, she had to leave for an appointment, but my sister was glad to see her and visit, and our aunt helped us get the planting started.

We were a good team, my sister and I, until my friend came along and joined us. She got down on her hands and knees to plant with us.

Soon, the three of us had planted dozens of different flowers, and watered them all.

My sister drove home knowing we had planted kindness. Now my daily chore is to water the flowers and keep all the hard work invested in this project blooming.

This is one in a series of “100 Acts of Kindness” stories submitted in conjunction with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department. To submit your own Act of Kindness story, visit MontcalmPrevention.org and click on one of the “100 Acts of Kindness” buttons.

Morning Sun

Tuesday, August 31, 2021

[Local News](#)

Fulton High one of nine school-related COVID outbreaks

New School Outbreaks

County	School Name	School Address	City	School grades	# of Cases	Staff, Students, or Both	Date Added to Website
Jackson	Hunt Elementary	1143 N Brown St	Jackson	Pre-school - elementary	2	Both	8/30/21
Lenawee	Tecumseh High School Girls Cross Country	760 Brown St	Tecumseh	High school	3	Students	8/30/21
Lenawee	Tecumseh High School Freshman Football	760 Brown St	Tecumseh	High school	2	Both	8/30/21
Marquette	Northern Michigan University	1401 Presque Isle Ave	Marquette	College - undergraduate	4	Students	8/30/21
Marquette	Northern Michigan University	1401 Presque Isle Ave	Marquette	Administrative	2	Staff	8/30/21
Marquette	Negaunee High School	500 W Arch St	Negaunee	High school	2	Both	8/30/21
Gratiot	Fulton High School	8060 Ely Hwy	Middleton	High school	4	Students	8/30/21
Oakland	Troy Athens High	4333 John R Rd	Troy	High school	2	Both	8/30/21
Livingston	Howell High School	1200 W Grand River Ave	Howell	High school	14	Both	8/30/21

Four Fulton High School students were reported as part of an outbreak of COVID-19 by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services on Monday. (Screenshot of MDHHS website)

By [Eric Baerren](#) | ebaerren@medianewsgroup.com | The Morning Sun

PUBLISHED: August 31, 2021 at 3:44 p.m. | UPDATED: August 31, 2021 at 4:17 p.m.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services reported nine school-related outbreaks of COVID-19 statewide on Monday. One of them involved four students at Fulton High School.

No information about whether the four contracted the disease at the school or during an afterschool program was available. The district is currently searching for a new permanent superintendent and high school principal, and a call seeking information was sent to the old one's voicemail.

It's mid-Michigan's first school-related outbreak of the 2021-22 school year. MDHHS defines an outbreak as two or more people from different households who have tested positive for COVID-19 occupying the same space at the same time.

After the first week of the new year, few area schools reported cases of COVID-19.



Related Articles

- [Fulton begins search for new superintendent](#)
- [Sunny weather expected throughout the week into Labor Day](#)
- [Saginaw man arrested in westside MP armed robbery](#)
- [Marijuana Regulatory Agency's public hearing on proposed business rules set for Sept. 27](#)
- [A unique look into Alzheimer's disease](#)

Two students at Mt. Pleasant High School are reported to have tested positive for the disease, but [the school was not listed](#) on the MDHHS's outbreak reporting that is updated on Monday.

The district reported three more cases, one involving students each at the middle school, Pullen Elementary and Vowles Elementary.

Only one other K-12 school district reported a case of COVID-19 involving a student or a member of the staff. Shepherd Schools sent a letter to members of its community earlier this week announcing a case. It didn't specify which school was involved or whether it was a student or member of staff.

Central Michigan University reported 10 cases on its dashboard within the last week, nine of them reported on Monday for a three-day average of three. CMU reported an additional case on Tuesday.

Alma College has recently tested seven members of its community who have shown symptoms of COVID-19, with one test returning as positive. The college also reports that it's tested an additional 776 members of its community.

Morning Sun

Friday, September 3, 2021

Local News

COVID outbreak prompts Ithaca K-6 mask order



Ithaca North Elementary School (Courtesy Ithaca Public Schools website)

By [Eric Baerren](#) | ebaerren@medianewsgroup.com | The Morning Sun

PUBLISHED: September 3, 2021 at 1:37 p.m. | UPDATED: September 3, 2021 at 2:09 p.m.

An outbreak of COVID-19 in the Ithaca school district has affected nine staff and students and prompted the health department to issue a mask order for grades K-6 in the district.

In a letter distributed to parents, Superintendent Steven Netzley said that six students and one member of staff at North Elementary and one student at South Elementary have tested positive for COVID-19. In addition, the district has quarantined two classrooms at each school.

Netzley also wrote that Mid-Michigan District Health Department has issued a mask order for staff, students and visitors at both schools effective Tuesday and continuing until the virus spread has stopped. An email was sent to Netzley asking if that meant until the district's outbreak was fully contained or until levels of community spread have diminished.

Both are intended to maintain the district's in-person learning, which Netzley wrote that he believes is the best option.

Daily News

Saturday, September 4, 2021

100 Acts of Kindness: Sitting with a friend

Submitted by the Mid-Michigan
District Health Department

There are times when you can find yourself in a difficult situation and feel you are alone. It is a blessing when someone steps up to simply be with you.

One day, a person with a few years behind her had a flu vaccine at the local Meijer's pharmacy. She waited the allotted time afterwards, felt good and went to do some shopping. At the end of the shopping, she was feeling light-headed and not sure she could make it home.

She had no-one she could call as her husband was experiencing health challenges and could not drive. Not really sure what was happening, her eyes darted to-and-fro, reflecting her mind's search for options.

At this point, another lady stepped up offering to help her with her groceries. She

was grateful for the offer from the stranger and they settled on a nearby bench chatting about this and that for a period of time. With the anxiousness subsiding and the light-headedness dissipating, the shopper was able to gather her energy and feel her strength return.

After another little while, the shopper thanked her new friend and was able to make her way home. With a simple act of compassion and an open ear, a true gift of kindness was shared by the two new friends.

This is one in a series of "100 Acts of Kindness" stories submitted in conjunction with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department. To submit your own Act of Kindness story, visit MontcalmPrevention.org and click on one of the "100 Acts of Kindness" buttons.

Daily News

Saturday, September 11, 2021

100 Acts of Kindness: The Giving Tree

Submitted by the Mid-Michigan District
Health Department

Many years ago, a kind and generous Lakeview Elementary School teacher noticed a child in her class who needed warm clothing. She contacted the child's parents, to get their permission and sizes, and shopped for the child. She gave the parents the items as Christmas gifts for the child.

When the teacher shared with other staff members what she had done, many of them chose to do the same for a child in their classroom. They called the project "The Giving Tree." Every year, the project grew bigger; the list of children grew longer, but staff and community members were able to provide for the children and appreciative parents.

The original teacher retired, but another teacher took over the project, and every Christmas, children from Lakeview schools received gifts from their teachers and people in the community. The initiative grew to include more buildings in the district and many more children. It continued through the years, with the families' confidentiality protected by their teachers with a system where a child/family was given a letter of the alphabet, and a form was

sent home to learn what their sizes and needs were.

Over the years, the Giving Tree project grew to be a community project, as businesses, churches, individuals and groups purchased needed items for the students. Some groups formed committees to shop, some put tags on Giving Tree Christmas trees, some shopped online.

The project begins in early fall each year, as staff members identify families in need, and provide them with an application. From those applications, recipients are matched with donors. Confidentiality is essential, so the recipient is only identified by age and gender. Families provide sizes, favorite colors and much needed items. The goal is to provide each child with shoes or boots, socks, underwear, pants, a shirt, personal hygiene products and a special item, like a toy. In November, sponsors are given the details of their children and begin shopping. In mid-December, the families pick up their gifts.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, The Giving Tree Project 2020 faced special challenges, as students were learning virtually, and families were quarantined in their homes. Still, the need was

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100 Acts of Kindness

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there. This year's chairpersons, Tanya Ringlever and Holly Poll, contacted their "sponsors," who began to shop. Despite delays in shipping, limits on gathering, and illness, families were rewarded with gifts as well as personal care items, laundry soap and toilet paper.

The community involvement put smiles on the faces of students and brings a warm feeling to the sponsors. The Giving Tree 2020 initiative provided gifts to a

record-setting number of children, as 183 children needed a bit more help due to the impact of COVID-19. Lakeview community members stepped forward to provide 100 acts of kindness, plus 83 more.

This is one in a series of "100 Acts of Kindness" stories submitted in conjunction with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department. To submit your own Act of Kindness story, visit MontcalmPrevention.org and click on one of the "100 Acts of Kindness" buttons.

Gratiot County Herald

Thursday, September 15, 2021

Now is a great time to get caught up on missed immunizations

Vaccines are proven to protect people from serious diseases but delayed routine healthcare during the pandemic has led to a significant decline in routine vaccination for all ages.

Like many other states nationwide, Michigan saw a decline in vaccination coverage due to the COVID-19 pandemic. What is most alarming is how the pandemic affected the vaccination rate in children. According to data from the Michigan Care Improvement Registry (MCIR), as of June 2021 only 54.7 percent of Michigan children 19 through 35 months of age were fully immunized with recommended vaccines.

Now that children are back in school, and adults who may have been working from home during the pandemic are back in the workplace, it is more important than ever to get caught up with routine vaccinations.

If you are unsure what vaccinations you or your family need, you can visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Interactive Vaccine Guide, which provides information on the vaccines recommended during pregnancy and throughout a child's life. Adults 19 and older can take the CDC's Adult Vaccine Assessment Tool to find out which vaccines they may need.

Vaccination appointments can be made by calling your doctor's office or the Mid-Michigan District [Health](#) Department. In Clinton County, call 989-224-2195. In Gratiot County call 989-875-381. In Montcalm County call 989-831-5237.

In addition to getting caught up on any missed vaccinations, be sure to schedule any other healthcare appointments that may be overdue, including dental care, eye care, and mental health visits.

Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties.

Gratiot County Herald

Thursday, September 15, 2021

Phone survey is not a scam

If you receive a call from someone “on behalf of your local [health](#) department,” asking you to take a survey, don’t worry; it’s not a scam.

Randomly selected residents in Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties will be asked to participate in a phone survey from Public Sector Consultants, on behalf of the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD). The calls are currently being made and will end on December 30, 2021.

The purpose of this short, 15-minute Behavioral Risk Factor Survey (BRFS) is to gather information on human behavior and lifestyle patterns, such as access to healthcare and health insurance, smoking, and exercise. Completing the survey will give MMDHD valuable information on the health and well-being of our residents, help determine strategies to improve health, and assist in securing funding to implement programs.

The calls will be made from Advantage Research Services, a Grand Rapids based call center. The calls will be placed to landlines and cell phones on weekdays and weekends, no later than 9:00 p.m.

The surveyor will not ask the person their name, social security number, address, employment information, or financial information. They may ask what type of insurance the person has but will not ask for specifics, like account numbers.

The BRFS was established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as a way to collect important health-related information. For many states and communities, the BRFS is the only available source of timely, accurate data.

Residents with questions regarding the phone survey may contact MMDHD at 989-831-3627.

Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot, and Montcalm Counties.

Daily News

Thursday, September 16, 2021

More than 130 people attend Greenville Board of Education meeting to speak out against COVID mandates

By [Cory Smith](#) | on September 16, 2021



More than 130 people attended Monday's meeting of the Greenville Public Schools Board of Education, which was moved to the Performing Arts Center at Greenville High School to accommodate the large crowd. Nearly 30 people spoke during a public comment period that lasted 90 minutes, the majority of comments focused on concerns over potential mask and vaccine mandates. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

GREENVILLE — For the third consecutive meeting of the Greenville Public Schools Board of Education, a growing audience continued to voice concern of potential mandates regarding face masks and COVID-19 vaccines.

Monday's meeting was moved from its regular location at the school district's Central Services Facility to the Performing Arts Center auditorium at Greenville High School in order to accommodate an anticipated capacity crowd.



Pictured during Monday's meeting of the Greenville Public Schools Board of Education, from left, student representative Molly Ramos, Trustee Charlie Mahar, Superintendent Linda Van Houten, Board President Norice Rasmussen and Trustee Rocky Hansen listen as 28 individuals speak during a public comment period that lasted 90 minutes, the majority of comments focused on concerns over potential mask and vaccine mandates. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

While no change in policy has been issued since the board was first approached by members of the "Stand Up Montcalm" grassroots group on Aug. 9, more than 130 people were seated in the auditorium for Monday's meeting. Public comment lasted 90 minutes as 28 individuals chose to speak, each allotted a maximum of five minutes to address the board.

Despite the Greenville school district having no face mask or vaccine mandates in place at this time, the majority of those who spoke directed the same concerns to the board that have been repeated throughout the past month. Some of those concerns stem from neighboring Kent County.

On Aug. 20 the Kent County Health Department issued a mandate which ordered students and staff to mask up inside preschool through sixth grade school buildings, with the department citing "imminent danger" and "preventable deaths and illness" in its decision.

While no such mandate has yet been issued by the Mid-Michigan District Health Department for Montcalm County, many of those who spoke Monday said they believe it's only a matter of time.

As of Sept. 12, Montcalm County is experiencing a weekly COVID-19 positivity rate of 12.74%, compared to 12.5% in Kent County, though none of the four hospitals within Montcalm County have any more than seven COVID-19 patients, with only one patient in the ICU at Spectrum Health United Hospital.

According to the Greenville Public Schools' website, since the start of the school year on Aug. 23, 57 positive cases have been reported among students and staff now in the fourth week of school. Among those cases, 48 are students and nine are staff, with 24 cases reported at the high school, 17 at the middle school and 16 among the district's four elementary schools.

‘Choice’ over ‘mandates’

The theme of the evening was set with the first commenter, Sidney Township resident Kenny Ybabez, who asked the school board not to go down a path that would lead to mandates.



Montcalm Township resident Steve Pahl raises his arms in frustration as he addresses the Greenville Public Schools Board of Education on Monday regarding the issue of potential mask or vaccine mandates. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

“I came here tonight to voice my opinion against any mask or vaccine mandate issued by our government,” Ybabez said. “I think us as a community, we understand it’s a difficult position that you are in, (but) I’m also here to remind you that you serve the students and parents of this community. You are not a government-enforcement agency. You are here to aid us in teaching our children.”

Rep. Pat Outman, R-Six Lakes, also spoke, saying he believed it was unfair to place a burden on school children to prevent the spread of the coronavirus when adults have had an opportunity to receive a vaccine dating back several months.

“Masking children at minimal risk to the virus was justified last year on the grounds that it might prevent infections in vulnerable adults who had no defense against the virus, but now that vaccines are readily available and everyone who wants to get vaccinated has had the chance to do so, why burden children for the sake of adults who have deliberately chosen not to get the vaccine?” Outman asked. “Since when do children bear the responsibility for adult decisions? If parents feel it is best for their kids to do so because their child is immunocompromised, or any other reason, that’s one thing, but to mandate that all kids be masked is completely unnecessary.”



Greenville resident Terri Edwards addresses the Greenville Public Schools Board of Education on Monday regarding the issue of potential mask or vaccine mandates. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

As students, parents and grandparents of students attending Greenville continued to speak, a plethora of reasons mixed with facts, opinions and conspiracy theories were given as to why mandates should not be considered.

Those reasons included allegations that having to wear a mask or receive a vaccine is considered a form of bullying, that such mandates can result in mental health issues, that a high survival rate from COVID-19 would mean mandates are not warranted, that face masks don't work, that the vaccine is worse than the virus, that the federal government is lying, that treatments for COVID-19 are more preferable than a vaccine, that mandates violate personal freedoms, that the science behind decisions should be questioned and that other measures such as hand-washing should be reinforced.

But primarily, most in the audience argued that a decision to wear a mask or receive a vaccine should be a choice of a parent or student, not a school district or health department.



Rep. Pat Outman, R-Six Lakes, addresses the Greenville Public Schools Board of Education on Monday regarding the issue of potential mask or vaccine mandates. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

“I do not agree with the school board coming down on us as parents saying if your child wants to attend GPS, you must have a mandated vaccine,” Greenville resident Beth Pentoney said. “I also do not agree that the school board should say to a teacher that you must have a vaccine to teach the children. Vaccines are a personal choice. It is our choice as parents to choose whether or not we want to vaccinate our children. It is your job as educators to teach our children about what the world is supposed to be like — history, math, science reading. It’s not your decision what I choose to put in my child’s body.”

Some quoted Biblical scripture and made claims that they were “standing up in the name of Jesus” in speaking out against mandates, while others compared such mandates to controlling and propaganda efforts utilized by Nazi Germany in World War II or needing a “falling of the Berlin Wall,” referencing the start of the end of communism in Eastern and Central Europe in 1989.

Some commenters said they believed that if the current status quo remained of having masks and vaccines be optional, there would be no issue going forward.

“To me, this is so simple — just keep it optional. That’s it,” Montcalm Township resident Shannon Lowry said.

However, some members of the audience criticized members of the board and administration who were wearing a mask at the meeting.



Members of the Greenville Public Schools Board of Education, joined by district administrators, listen to an audience of more than 130 people as students, parents and grandparents speak out on concerns regarding potential mask and vaccine mandates during a 90-minute public comment portion of Monday's meeting held at the Performing Arts Center at Greenville High School. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

"I'm asking every one of you up there — take your mask off. You don't need it," Greenville resident James Byer said. "You've been exposed to COVID, Doc (addressing Board Trustee Jodi Petersen, Ph.D.), you know you have. That mask ain't helping you. You aren't six feet away from him. All those things they've told you, you know it's not true. Come on. Who are you kidding? It's symbolism."

While members of the Board did not respond to comments at the meeting, Board President Norice Rasmussen told the Daily News Wednesday that the school district is listening to the concerns that were brought forward while reiterating that no mandates are in place at this time.

"We have been encouraging people to wear masks and vaccinate as requested in partnership with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department," she said. "We realize that this is a very emotional time for everyone — students, parents, and community members. Throughout our entire district, administrators, teachers and staff members truly and passionately care about all students and want what is best for all students. They continue to do an amazing job and are keeping the lines of communication open. We recognize and value all our stakeholders and their passion for all students."