

**Locally Elected Working Together**  
**Advocating for Johnson County Children and Families**

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To: Johnson County Board of Commissioners/Board of Health  
From: Johnson County Elected Officials  
RE: Working together to support our children, families and community  
Date: December 8th, 2021

Greetings to the Johnson County Board of County Commissioners and Board of Health,

Collectively, we as the duly elected to serve and represent our community, are writing to you to share important information and engage in a conversation to work together with you to make positive strides for children and families in Johnson County. In order to make a positive impact for all of our constituents, it is necessary that we focus on not passing the responsibility back and forth but rather we desire to work together.

We are in the middle of the third school year during the COVID-19 pandemic. When we were first presented with this pandemic, in March of 2020, we knew we had a lot to learn about this virus. We now have 21 months of data. Our Johnson County children in our school districts are suffering. We are seeing a greatly increased number of mental health issues, behavioral issues, educational detriment including learning loss and decreased test scores across the county as reported to and available on KSDE. We are seeing teachers, administrators and staff working harder than ever feeling defeated. We are seeing families struggle with loss of income due to quarantines, behavioral issues and mental health. Our elementary school teachers are explaining that children are unable to effectively learn phonics and to learn to read appropriately with a mask covering their mouths and their teacher's faces. Reading learning loss is greatly affecting all subjects and creating failure across the districts. Attached to this email is one of the many communications from a Johnson County Kindergarten teacher.

While we know this virus is real and can be detrimental, with 21 months of data, we have learned COVID-19 least affects the 0-19 age demographic. While we see that positive cases are occurring and will continue, the outcomes we see from the positive cases, thankfully, do not affect our children greatly. From the current Johnson County data provided by Assistant County Manager Joe Connor on Tuesday, December 7th, it is confirmed that in the past 21 months, the 0-19 age group has reported a total of 69 hospitalized cumulatively since March 2020. Data from the US Census bureau shows Johnson County has approximately 145,000 children under age 18. This means that less than 0.04% of all Johnson County children have had a negative outcome to having a positive COVID-19 infection in 21 months. Thankfully, we have not had a death in the 0-19 age group in 21 months.

By January 1st, 2022 all school aged children 5 years and older will have had the opportunity, if their parents or guardians so choose, for COVID-19 immunization and can be considered fully vaccinated. This is following the FDA approval for pediatric vaccination on November 17, 2021.

It is time to lead together. We desire to lead with you. It is time to end the mask mandate for all children. It is time to lead and do our part to heal the division in our community and this divisive rhetoric. This begins with discontinuing the mask mandate that only targets students during school hours. We are hearing loudly from our constituents and know it is our responsibility to be their voice advocating for what is best for Johnson County children and families. We can not ignore their requests to do what is best for their students. We implore you to listen and discontinue the mandate beginning January 1st, 2022 to impact the second semester of the 2021-2022 school year. Masks can still be optional as parents and

teachers can weigh their own personal decisions against what is best for their students, learning loss, virus risk, and mental health.

We are requesting you add this as an action item to the December 16th, 2021 Board of County Commissioners meeting as this is your last meeting of the year before the second semester of this school year.

Respectfully and gratefully,  
Signed 26 Duly Elected Public Servants in Johnson County

Ali Seeling, Spring Hill USD230 Board of Education Member  
Sheriff Calvin Hayden, Johnson County Sheriff  
Michelle Dombrosky, Kansas State Board of Education Member  
Adam Thomas, Kansas House of Representative 26  
Rob Olson, Kansas Senate 23  
Molly Baumgardner, Kansas Senate 37  
Beverly Gossage, Kansas Senate 9  
Mike Thompson, Kansas Senate 10  
Kellie Warren, Kansas Senate 11  
Charlotte Esau, Kansas House of Representative 14  
Bill Sutton, Kansas Representative 43  
Megan Lynn, Kansas Representative 49  
Kaety Bowers, Blue Valley USD Board of Education Member Elect  
Tom Reddin, Gardner/Edgerton USD 231 Board of Education Member Elect  
Jeff Miller, Gardner/Edgerton USD 231 Board of Education Member Elect  
Brian Connell, Olathe USD233 Board of Education Member Elect  
Robert Kuhn, Olathe USD 233 Board of Education Member Elect  
Lana Sutton, Gardner/Edgerton USD 231 Board of Education Member  
Jim McMullen, Blue Valley USD 229 Board of Education Member Elect  
Nels Anderson, Spring Hill USD230 Board of Education Member  
Rachele Zade, DeSoto USD 232 Board of Education Member  
Greg Chapman, Gardner/Edgerton USD 231 Board of Education Member Elect  
Karin Brownlee, Olathe City Councilwoman  
Kevin Gilmore, Olathe City Councilman  
Jacklynn Walters, Shawnee City Councilwoman Elect  
Tony Gillette, City of Shawnee City Councilman Elect

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Good Morning,

I am a kindergarten teacher and had a question for the board. I would like to stay anonymous if possible please but I understand if that is not an option.

Now that the vaccine is available for all school aged children, are we looking into removing the mask mandate or allowing teachers to be exempt? It is incredibly difficult to teach phonics (letter sounds) and phonemic awareness (rhyming, syllables, etc.) with a mask. The students cannot hear the specific sounds that I am teaching and I cannot hear theirs when I am assessing them on their sounds. It is incredibly difficult to tell the difference between many sounds such as b and d or m and n.

These kids are already starting without preschool or have had two abnormal years of schooling due to covid and it has been a struggle trying to meet these extra social needs along with the challenges of wearing a mask.

I know that the Johnson County mandate complicates things but I was not sure if we were going to bring this discussion up again or not. The mental health of our teachers and paras should matter too. I know that I am speaking for MANY teachers when I am asking you all to please consider allowing us to drop the mandate or allow us the choice.

Thank you for listening!