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Office of  
Trustee Diane McNally

To: Board of Education, SD61 Greater Victoria  
Date: January 25, 2021  
Re: Emergent issue motion for Board meeting Jan 25/21

### **Background**

Here on the Island, Thursday Jan. 23, 2021 was a record high day for COVID cases in the Island Health area.

BC Provincial Health Officer Dr Bonnie Henry said in October 2020 : “I know that young people are adaptable and that many of them are wearing masks on a routine basis, whether they are ordered to or not, and I think that’s really important. And we need to continue that and continue the encouragement of that over the coming months.”

Dr Henry stated “The mask mandate that we put in place very recently talks about those public indoor places. And yes, children are required to wear masks in public indoor spaces as well as in their schools.” Unless they’re in a classroom.

Surrey Teachers’ Association letter to Dr Bonnie Henry in December 2020 asserts that masks should be mandated for everyone in schools--not only teachers and adults – and in every school space. Currently, students and staff must wear masks in common areas, like hallways.

During the first coronavirus (COVID-19) briefing of 2021 on Monday, Jan. 4, Dr Henry told reporters that health officials are re evaluating safety measures and plans after the Surrey School District reported 50 COVID cases at Earl Marriott Secondary School.

Ontario requires all students age 10 and up to wear masks everywhere in school, including classrooms.

Dr Amy Tan, a palliative care and family physician in Victoria who co-founded Masks4Canada to encourage mask-wearing during the pandemic said children “are not the driver, i.e. the superspreader, but I think to say that there’s no transmission is also erroneous...I still think that mitigating the risks is important. Even if they’re not excessive spreaders, they are spreading to some degree. And I think, why not put in all measures? If every added layer is going to help with

safety, why not add this?" Dr Tan would like to see masks mandated for students in kindergarten to Grade 12, with exemptions on an individual basis for students who can't wear masks for various reasons. Dr. Tan referred to a University of Alberta study that showed one-third of children who tested positive for COVID-19 in the province were asymptomatic. Her 3-year-old niece in Boston wears a mask outside and at daycare, as Boston has mandated masks everywhere outside of one's residence.

In Toronto, testing of students at Thorncliffe Park elementary school found 18 asymptomatic students had the virus. The Toronto District School board has issued this directive: "Unless an exemption applies that would allow a student, staff or visitor to attend in person without a mask, the wearing of appropriate masks is mandatory at TDSB schools or buildings. This Procedure provides direction to superintendents, principals, managers, staff, visitors, parents and students on the TDSB's mask requirements and exemption requests."

Edmonton Public Schools' directive states: "Physical distancing in many of our classrooms will be challenging. Given this, masks are mandatory as an additional means of protection for staff and students", while affirming that students who are "physically, psychologically or developmentally" unable to wear a mask will be exempted.

Saskatchewan's Chief Medical Health Officer Dr. Saqib Shahab made public his guidelines in November 2020, which state that masks are required for all students age 3 and older (who are able to wear a mask), and all employee and visitors in schools, with the exception of while they are consuming food or beverages.

The US Centers for Disease Control site states that "In general, children 2 years and older should wear a mask ..." with exceptions for "children with certain disabilities, including cognitive, intellectual, developmental, sensory and behavioral disorders."

The Board of Education meets over Zoom, yet we send our students and staff into social groups.

Clearly, other jurisdictions have taken more precautionary measures than BC's to protect students, front line educators, and other staff.

### **Alignment With Strategic Plan:**

- Mission: "We nurture each student's learning and well-being in a **safe**, responsive and inclusive learning community."
- Goal 3, Strategy 4: "...support all learners' **physical** and mental **well-being**."  
"...**maximize physical health** and mental well-being."

### **Recommended Motion:**

That the Board direct the Superintendent to add the following to the District's COVID plan: All students and staff are required to wear non-medical masks when physical distancing is not possible, with exemptions for those who are unable to wear them,

and FURTHER, that the Board direct the Board Chair to write a letter to Dr. Henry expressing support for a broadened mask mandate for schools.

