



'Damn politics when it comes to life and death.'

Harold Worley

Council votes to end mask mandate Oct. 30

BY CHARLES D. PERRY
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Horry County's mask mandate will expire on Oct. 30.

After a convoluted debate that spanned more than half an hour Tuesday night, council members ultimately lacked the votes to continue the mandate, which has been in place since July 3.

"The numbers are going in the wrong direction, guys, for us to be doing this," Horry County Councilman Harold Worley said. "We have friends in North Myrtle Beach that are dying from this COVID. I see you folks out there as my family. As a community leader, I believe that what we should do is do what we believe in our hearts is the right thing. Damn politics when it comes to life and death. And I believe that this mask can't hurt and it could possibly help."

The mask mandate's fate was determined after council members debated multiple motions and proposals, including changing the ordinance language to state that the council simply encouraged mask usage. At one point, visibly frustrated council members adjourned for five minutes and some walked into an adjacent room to talk. When the meeting began again, there was still confusion among councilmen about whether they were voting for an amendment to a motion or a motion itself.

The end result was the council did not extend the mask mandate and did not create a new mandate to replace the expiring one.

"You have to wear a mask just about everywhere you go," Horry County Council Chairman Johnny Gardner said. "The problem that you're seeing is that some of the people aren't wearing it right. A lot of people are tired of wearing it; they don't think it's working. And I don't want to get bogged

down into the math or the science about it because there are so many people saying one thing and so many saying the other. It's just that the county council decided enough was enough."

Under the policy that will end this month, people entering businesses are required to wear face coverings while inside those establishments. Masks may be removed to receive certain services, such as a haircut, or for someone to eat a meal at a restaurant.

Restaurants and retail stores must also require their employees to wear masks, and the ordinance also applies to personal care providers such as nail

salons, tattoo parlors and barber shops.

Violating the policy is a civil infraction punishable by a \$25 fine for the first offense, \$50 for a second offense and \$100 for all subsequent violations. The ordinance states that each day of not wearing a mask is considered a separate offense.

The proposal on Tuesday's agenda was to create a new emergency ordinance that included the same mask mandate. An emergency ordinance requires a two-thirds majority of council to pass (eight votes). In recent weeks, the mask mandate has received support from seven council members:



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MASK MANDATE, A2 Horry County Councilman Harold Worley spoke against ending the mandate to wear masks.

Schools hope to quash COVID reporting rumors

BY KATIE POWELL
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Horry County Schools did their best to quash rumors Monday night that the district was coding COVID-19 cases as flu cases to cover up the "real" numbers.

"I don't have enough time to invent data," said HCS Superintendent Rick Maxey. "We're not hiding anything. What we're doing is dealing with the facts, with what we know. And it's verified by DHEC [the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control]."

The board voted Monday night to change their Re-Opening Plan to move to hybrid instruction indefinitely, until the district sees fit to move schools to face-to-face, five-day learning.

This also meant that each school would be considered separately – if there were to be an outbreak, the district could decide to move only that particular school to distance learning for a time, or a school with no cases might be moved to full-time school.

Part of the changes approved also include using the HCS COVID-19 dashboard information in the decision-making process, and Maxey

'I'm not part of any conspiracy theory.'

**Velna Allen
HCS chief
of student services**

said all information on the dashboard is updated twice a day and the positives are DHEC-verified.

Chief of Student Services Velna Allen and Director of Health Services Tammy Trulove addressed the board to explain the new way the district is coding attendance during the COVID-19 pandemic, a coding method given to the district by the S.C. Department of Education.

Allen said some parents were upset when they logged into their recently-absent student's Powerschool (student data software) account to see that it was coded "SC-FLU."

"Part of the confusion some have experienced with parents is that a

nurse has nothing to do with attendance. They don't enter attendance codes," Allen said.

Nurses send the information to the attendance clerks to code, Allen said, and if they see the child and send them home, they tell the clerk it should be "SC-NURS" in the system.

"If the nurse does not see the child, they cannot recommend an excused code. They would be making decisions on a child they did not lay their eyes on," Allen said.

As for how attendance is being coded for children who go home feeling sick, board chairman Ken Richardson asked Allen if people were coding sick children with the flu to hide COVID-19 cases.

"I'm not part of any conspiracy theory," Allen said.

SC-FLU is not a new code, Allen said, it has been used before for flu season, and she and Trulove both emphasized to the board that there is not a separate code for COVID-19 in the system.

The district was instructed by the state to use SC-FLU when a child is showing flu-like symptoms, Allen said.

"We do not change that code even if they become DHEC-confirmed positive. It will still show SC-FLU,"

Allen said.

Once the district has confirmation of a positive virus case, they will go into the comments section of the SC-FLU code and put in the term "COVID" or "COVID-19".

But when parents go in and see "SC-FLU", they don't have access to the comments section to see the COVID designation, so all they will see is "SC-FLU".

Clearing up confusion on quarantines, contact tracing, and testing

The HCS COVID-19 dashboard currently shows active virus cases for seven days before moving them to the "historical" category, based on guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

Some board members questioned why that happened after seven days, when students are asked to quarantine for ten.

"Maybe that's why a lot of people think our dashboard is incorrect. To me, you're not historic until you walk back into school," said District 5 board member Janice Morreale. "I don't think that's accurate representation ... it's not covering the whole time you're supposed to quarantine ... not painting an accurate picture of

RUMORS, A2

Hybrid model continues despite uptick in pandemic cases

BY KATIE POWELL
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The Horry County Board of Education voted 11-1 Monday night to change its re-opening plan and keep schools in a hybrid instruction model until the district is able to return to five-day, in-person learning.

"We're not abandoning our plan," vice chairman John Poston said. "We're making smart adjustments from our experience... What we have to do is what is best for the children of Horry County. We can keep adapting... We've got to work on this thing together."

District 1 member Russell Freeman cast the lone vote against the change.

Superintendent Rick Maxey recommended using the district's own COVID-19 assessments in addition to the S.C. Department of



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Some teachers brought signs supporting fellow educators.

Health and Environmental Control's data to determine each individual school's instructional models.

The extent of COVID-19 spread will vary depending on the school, Maxey said, noting that instructional models for individual

rooms, any future move to five-day instruction could begin with elementary grades and move up from there.

The district also intends to give parents five days of notice before a change in instructional models, and

school officials reserve the right to use any local data in the future to decision-making.

Last week, in a move that made some parents happy and upset others, the school board decided to continue to have children attend school this week in a hybrid format instead of going to full distance learning. The move was a departure from the previously approved plan, which called for switching to complete distance learning when COVID-19 numbers reached high levels in the DHEC Disease Activity Report.

During Monday night's meeting, Maxey said the reopening plan was never intended to be set in stone.

Parents who want five-day, face-to-face learning and teachers disappointed in the district's departure from its original plan both

came to Monday's meeting to express their views.

"I'm here to show unity, and to say that it's time for teachers to stand up and demand a bit more respect," said Conway High School teacher Aryn Kavanaugh.

Virtual teacher Kyle Myers said the district should stick with its original plan.

"That's what families made decisions on and now that's all changed," Myers said, as she gathered with about 20 other teachers in the district office parking lot before the meeting. "We are here for the teachers, students and families."

Both sides signed up for public comment to address the board directly.

Parent Brandon Floyd, who has two children in the school district and a spouse who works in special education, said he believes the children need face-

to-face instruction.

"What I don't understand is... I don't see this [virus] being something that is going to harm a lot of our kids," Floyd said. "My wife, as a teacher, she wants to be with those kids; she thinks they need it."

HCS Virtual teacher Cori Canada addressed the board, saying teachers are overworked, underpaid and don't fully trust the district after the recent "back and forth" decisions.

"We are drowning, whether teaching virtually or in the building," Canada said. "The last thing I want to see is good teachers leaving the profession because they can't take it anymore."

Board of Education Chairman Ken Richardson recently said he is unhappy with the reliability of

HYBRID, A2

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