

# In Defense of Parental Rights

## A Message from Larimer County School Leaders, November 14, 2021

The united school boards and school heads represented by this letter, having been duly elected and/or appointed to their positions, are accountable to their respective school communities as well as the citizens and taxpayers of Larimer County. In this capacity, it is our combined duty to challenge the overreaching scope of the Ninth Public Health Order of October 20th, 2021, both on its necessity for public health and for its significant harm to education.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, northern Colorado charter and private schools have worked with the Larimer County Department of Health and Environment (LCDHE) to balance the important objectives of public health and education. When local charter and private schools opted to offer in-person education during the 2020-2021 school year while most schools in the region remained remote-only, it was our low case counts and almost non-existent transmission outcomes along with fully approved and field-tested safety procedures that enabled other schools to eventually return to in-person learning. Many school leaders from around the community toured charter and private schools to learn best-practices to protect their students.

Yet, for all of our good faith efforts, our students and their families find themselves frustratingly at odds with recent unilateral policy decisions forcing children in schools to wear masks. Let us be clear: despite how this disagreement has been portrayed, this is not charter and private schools against county health officials. Charter and private schools are simply positioned between the county and the parents and families of students who oppose this policy. Relying on public comments at our meetings and countless emails and conversations with families, we write on behalf of our constituencies as well as families from around Larimer County who are not enrolled in our schools, but who also oppose the compulsory masking of minors.

If the only issue were the universally acknowledged inconvenience of wearing a mask, we wouldn't be writing this letter. We have been, and continue to be, willing partners in the pursuit of civic responsibility. However, many of our constituents simply do not agree that the questionable benefits outweigh the costs of compulsory pediatric masking. In eighteen months, we have learned a lot about the coronavirus pandemic:

- ◆ Masks have been shown to have negative impacts on the psychological, physiological, and emotional development of children.
- ◆ Certain early and time-critical education skills – such as reading and diction – cannot be accomplished while wearing a mask. Failure to learn these skills snowballs into much more significant learning deficits later.
- ◆ Masks impair student-teacher interaction by blocking the face which is an essential source of information. Eighty (80) percent of human communication relies on non-verbal cues with only twenty (20) percent coming from the words. Most non-verbal communication is centered on the face.
- ◆ The lack of benefit from mandatory student mask use has been born out locally this school year -- in northern Colorado, the case rates between mask-mandating and mask-optional schools are statistically insignificant.
- ◆ No comprehensive, rigorous real-world study has shown significant benefits of community-wide mask mandates for children. Most studies of mask effectiveness have also included other mitigating factors, such as masking adults and ventilation, making it impossible to single-out masks as the source of improvement.
- ◆ Children do not effectively transmit the coronavirus to adult populations. Some of our students caught COVID-19 and, after lengthy quarantines with family, never transmitted it to anyone else in their household. Where schools have been opened around the world there has not been a marked increase in community rates.
- ◆ For the overwhelming majority of children, COVID-19 and its variants to date have limited effects and a miniscule mortality rate. Many pediatric cases present without any symptoms at all. There have been zero pediatric deaths from COVID-19 in Larimer County.
- ◆ While the novel coronavirus disproportionately impacts our elderly citizens and citizens with certain preexisting conditions, experts suggest that these impacts can be mitigated by vaccinations which have been widely available – at no charge – for months. Locally, vaccination rates among vulnerable populations are higher than the general population.

The public policy question before us is more complex than the one-size-fits-all approach of the Ninth Public Health Order. There are trade-offs that are being made which have a dramatically deleterious impact on those subjects for which we have expertise (e.g. education, child welfare, and child development), while seeming to provide a miniscule benefit for those subjects on which LCDHE claims expertise (e.g. health, epidemiology, virology).

In the interest of creating public policy that does not result in unnecessary trade-offs, we the elected boards and/or appointed leaders, on behalf of our families and students, seek the establishment of a direct channel of communication between the parents of Larimer County and the local public-health agency. It is specifically for this reason we believe our leadership is necessary now, more than ever, as we endeavor to spark such a dialog for the benefit of our students. To do so, we urge our fellow-citizens' demonstration of support in reestablishing individual responsibility and community collaboration versus government fiat as the best mechanisms to fight the novel coronavirus.

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