

SPECIAL BOARD MEETING  
 SEPTEMBER 7, 2021  
 SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION OFFICE

A special meeting of the Board of Trustees of Mountain Home School District No. 193 was convened at 6:30 p.m., September 7, 2021, at the District Administration Office, 470 N 3<sup>rd</sup> East, Mountain Home, Idaho, in said district, pursuant to authority provided by Title 74, Chapter 2, Section 74-202(4)(c)(6)(b) – Open Meeting (Special Meeting), Idaho Code, and pursuant to affirmation by the Clerk that notice of the special meeting had been given to each trustee and posted public notice as required by law. A copy of the Notice of a Special Meeting of School Trustees so posted follows:

**September 7, 2020**  
**NOTICE OF SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

**MOUNTAIN HOME SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 193**  
**Mountain Home, Elmore County, Idaho**

*Courtesy Livestream Board Meetings: Zoom/Livestreaming/recording board meetings is a courtesy to give the public an alternative means of attending a school board meeting; the board meeting would continue even if there is a failure of technology affecting the zoom meeting (<https://www.mtnhomesd.org/calendar.html>).*

**Join Zoom Meeting**

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87846150039?pwd=czFyTlIHZmp5ek9WZjVURmNKK0Nzd09>

Meeting ID: 878 4615 0039

Passcode: 376230

Find your local number: <https://us06web.zoom.us/u/kboMOKmE35>

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that a special meeting of the Board of Trustees of Mountain Home School District No. 193, will be held on Tuesday, September 7, 2021, at 6:30 p.m., located at District Administrative Office Boardroom, 470 E. 3<sup>rd</sup> North, Mountain Home, Idaho, in said District, during which the following business will be conducted:

- I. **CALL MEETING TO ORDER (ACTION)** – Chairman/Vice-Chairman
- II. **REPORT FROM MHAFB** – Colonel Mays
- III. **DISCUSSION OF ADDITIONAL COVID19 MITIGATION STRATEGIES (POSSIBLE ACTION)** – School Board of Trustee/James Gilbert
- IV. **ONLY WRITTEN PUBLIC INPUT (Public Input Form) WILL BE ACCEPTED**  
*Those wishing to submit public input to the Board must use the Public Input Form ([www.mtnhomesd.org](http://www.mtnhomesd.org)) that must be received by the Clerk of the Board by noon the day of the board meeting. All public input forms received will be forwarded to the Board of Trustees but might not be read aloud. Please do not include the names of students or staff due to FERPA Laws and privacy protection. There will be no public input via zoom. If you have a complaint against personnel or students by name, you need to schedule an appointment with the Superintendent. Safety and healthcare measures such as the wearing of face masks and social distancing will be followed during a CDC or State or School Board recognized pandemic. There is limited seating in the boardroom so patrons might have to sit in the foyer or the overflow room.*
- V. **ADJOURN**

This Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees of Mountain Home School District No. 193 is called pursuant to Title 74, Chapter 2, Section 74-202(4)(c)(6)(b) – Open Meeting (Special Meeting), Idaho Code.

Dated the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of September 2021.



Sharon M. Whitman  
 Clerk, School District No. 193  
 Mountain Home, Elmore, Idaho

- I. **CALL MEETING TO ORDER** – Chairperson/Vice-chairperson. Chairman Abrego convened the special meeting of the Board of Trustees at 6:30 p.m.

Trustees Present: Chairman Abrego, Vice-Chair Binion, Trustee Donahue, Trustee Monasterio, Trustee Knox were in attendance for the start of the board meeting, thus establishing a two-thirds majority of the board IAW Idaho Code, Section 74-202.

Chairman Abrego informed the audience that the agenda stated that there would be no public input other than written input during the meeting. He added that everyone had the opportunity to submit input until noon today. Chairman Abrego asked for everyone to be respectful of each other and that this is a controversial matter with strong opinions from both sides of the matter.

- II. **REPORT FROM MHAFB** – Colonel Mays. Colonel Mays, 366 Deputy Support Group Commander & School District Liaison for the base, stated that he was impressed with how this school board was able to meet to discuss their differences and allow people the opportunity to send in input and concerns.

Colonel Mays reported that the base has a full mask mandate and personnel are required to wear masks off base as well. The reason being that the community spread of COVID is very high and the transmission rate. We also look at hospital space on and off base, we look at medical supplies, and we look at our vaccination rate for those eligible. One of the issues is our children aren't old enough to be vaccinated. The airmen on base are vaccinated and we know the Delta variant is 2½ times as contagious and the base has a healthy population, we actually do not have anyone in the hospital. However, those that are not vaccinated are going to the hospital at around 90%. The Delta variant is the illness of those who are not vaccinated. I'm asking the Board to consider the balance of freedom with safety. Please help us stay mission ready at the base, and with our younger kids not old enough to be vaccinated, and the older children, they come home, and they now have the potential to transmit COVID to their family members on base. The base saw a significant spike in COVID when the kids went back to school.

Chairman Abrego asked of those being hospitalized, what is the percentage of them being kids. Colonel Mays responded that the larger percentage that are associated with the base are older dependents. We have a healthy population, is not that the kids end up in the hospital, it's that the kids are more than likely transmitting the COVID. One thing to understand is that the vaccine doesn't prevent one from getting COVID, it minimizes the severity of the symptoms.

- III. **DISCUSSION OF ADDITIONAL COVID19 MITIGATION STRATEGIES (POSSIBLE ACTION)** – School Board of Trustee/James Gilbert

The board began discussion about the COVID19 status and the numerous cases of quarantines.

Superintendent Gilbert reported during the first three weeks of school the that the average daily attendance declined from 95% in the first week of school, the second week ADA was 87%, and we are down to 86% by the third week. Our typical ADA during normal school years is about 94%.

Superintendent Gilbert informed the Board that as of last Friday, the districtwide quarantines for students (close contact tracing) is 462. Close Contact Tracing are those students who've been in close contact (three feet) of someone with the virus for more than 15 minutes, and they must quarantine for 10-days but can return to school after five-days with a negative COVID test. Student positive cases as of this morning is 107 students tested positive for COVID, 14 staff who tested positive, and we also have an additional 10 staff who are on quarantine. One of the major issues is the increase of staff absences, and currently we have had 295 staff absences; during the Non-COVID school year of 2019-20, we only had 107 staff absences the first three weeks of school. We only have 30 active substitutes in the district to try to cover all the staff absences and this is an issue, not just for MHSD but statewide, so this has created critical staffing issue in buildings trying to keep staff positions filled. We also have a bus driver shortage, so there may come a time that a bus route cannot be served or may be cancelled, and the parent would either have to bring the child to school or the child would have to stay home.

Superintendent Gilbert stated that to put this in perspective, there will always be a debate on the effectiveness of masks and one can always find "proof" that meets one's personal narrative. He isn't looking at those studies. He wanted comparable data from school that have been in session for as long as we have.

Superintendent Gilbert reviewed some data of comparable schools regarding mask mandates in which the other school districts with mask mandates had lower cases of positive transmissions or exposures. He added that there are other mitigating factors in the numbers, and he understands that.

Superintendent Gilbert said that the reality is that COVID is here to stay; he wants to see that we do not have 462 kids not in school, he doesn't want to see 14 staff members out with COVID or 104 students out with COVID. We know that realistically, kids are going to get COVID, but the vast majority of COVID cases are coming from home from parents and siblings; there are 17-cases from school exposure. We don't want to put ourselves in a position in which we have to close schools.

Trustee Binion asked how many of the 462 were from multiple exposures. Superintendent Gilbert said that there are students who had to quarantine multiple times and that is very hard on both the student and the student's family for missing school; it's hard on staff to try to educate those absent students. He added that he knows not everyone is a fan of the CDC or CDH, but we need to follow the recommendation; this is not political, our goal is to keep the doors open to our schools; this is to keep our students and staff safe and healthy.

Trustee Binion also asked that of the 462 kids quarantined, if they were wearing masks, what is the percentage of the number kids that would not be quarantined. Superintendent Gilbert replied that according to CDH, if everyone including students were masked and one of them was exposed to COVID, no one would be quarantined except for the positive person. We would ask them to monitor themselves for 5-days for symptoms of COVID; the positive COVID students and staff would have to be quarantined.

Chairman Abrego asked when comparing us to the Boise School District, did you compare hospitalizations. Superintendent Gilbert replied that we do not have access to that information. He added that for us, it's a matter of how we can keep our schools open and how to keep our staff healthy and safe as well as students. There has been an increase in hospitalization across all demographics. Again, for us, its about keeping the doors open and have teachers in the buildings for those kids. In reality, once a student walks out of our buildings, there is nothing we can do to minimize the safety and health of the student, that is the parent's responsibility.

Trustee Monasterio asked about our current mitigation practices. Superintendent Gilbert answered that some of our current mitigation factors are focused on sanitization and optimizing as much social distancing as we can; the recommended 6'ft distancing, but it is acceptable to have a 3'ft distancing.

Chairman Abrego stated that the district's current mitigation is that masks are optional, so we aren't keeping anyone from wearing a mask, we are discouraging anyone from wearing a mask. If one wants to wear a mask they may. He added that he has seen some teachers wearing masks.

Trustee Binion asked if the CDC had recommendations for quarantining for other infectious diseases. Superintendent Gilbert replied yes, in the past quarantining students for other illnesses such as whooping cough, measles, chickenpox, etc. He added that much of the frustration is the sheer amount of time the administrators are having to spend to do contact tracing. The administrators have become the pseudo health care professional because those health offices that are supposed to do the contact tracing are not doing their job.

Chairman Abrego stated that he felt that the district needed to stop the quarantining. If a student is symptomatic, send the student home, but do not automatically quarantine students. Still do the contact tracing and contact all those parents. We don't need to automatically quarantine and that is part of the problem; quit with the quarantining. He added that a cloth over his face wasn't going to stop it. There is a variant, and then another variant, and now the MU variant, so it will keep coming. My point is we aren't going to stop it; we need to quit quarantining kids. We never quarantined kids before this, and I understand this is going to spread quite a bit. Chairman Abrego also state to check the hospitals to see the number of hospitalizations of young people. I haven't seen any increases of hospitalizations. I haven't seen any proof that masks helped us. We started last year in hybrid from the get-go and I was against that too. I was against masks and I was against hybrid and I said let us start the year off normal and we didn't do that, and I saw cases went up and down all year. We were hybrid until spring break and there were still cases. Cases were up and down and the reason was because the COVID ran its course and now

there is another one that has to run its course and until I see kids in the hospital and things like that...obviously if a kid has symptoms, send the kid home; if the kid has the flu, send the kid home; if the kid broke his leg, send the kid home. Chairman Abrego continued on with his opinion. He added that staff had the choice to be vaccinated so if they didn't that is on them and the same goes for parents; if their kid gets sent home, they have to deal with it and the parent will have to stay home. Parents should have the same type of option of whether to mask their kid or not, that is on them and they will have to stay home should their kid get sent home. Chairman Abrego said that the same goes for the fully super vaccinated airman, if their kid gets sent home, they will have to stay home and that's on them; that is just how it goes. If parents want kids wearing masks let their kids wear masks otherwise no masks. Trustee Knox agreed.

Trustee Donahue stated that they need to come to a common ground and understanding and these types of discussion are valuable and open enough to actually talk about issues such as this and knowing that there is just as much data and reporting from both sides of masking or not. We need to find a common ground. She said she wasn't completely convinced that the mitigations last year were necessarily the best way to go, but we need to have the conversation and if we could throw out some options and discussions that would be to the benefit or the safety and education of MHSD students. Trustee Donahue added that she didn't like to compare MHSD to Boise School District because their dynamics are very different from ours. She said that we can only do what we think is best with the information we have, but we have a community in which other administrations do not support what the school district does. It's like we are an island and she commended MHAFB for their proactiveness and all their support, yet Stephensen Elementary is mask less even though the airbase has a strict mask mandate. Trustee Donahue would like to discuss other options of what could be done and if we don't put out some options if some things to try and not get into one side vs the other of masks or no masks.

Chairman Abrego said that the district should try what he suggested. Trustee Donahue replied exactly, so let's hear some other suggestions. Trustee Binion stated that the district did do most of what Chairman Abrego asked this school year, except for some precautions of quarantining. He added that the Chair wanted the district to open as normal, all kids back in class, mask less, quarantines, and pretend COVID didn't exist, so we did that this year and what do we have to show. We have 462 students in quarantine and some multiple time with some kids only being able to attend for a few days, we have 107 cases as of last week; 295 employee absences with a substitute shortage, and we have school transmission. We know what the numbers were last year with mitigation and now we know what the numbers are this year and the numbers went up. Chairman Abrego disagreed and stated that numbers went up last year too. Trustee Donahue disagreed with the statement about pretending COVID didn't exist, nothing said like that ever came from the Board. She added that the Board was very open about discussing and trying different things all through the year. Conversation continued regarding taking some sort of action, student progress, medical issues, etc.

The Board continued their discussion on mitigation mandates in addition to other options, but no other options were suggested other than options that would require changing building schedules, sanitation and cleaning schedules, etc., but parents would need to understand that each building would have a different schedule. A lengthy discussion continued regarding cleaning, face masks, PE and masks, dirty face masks, parents not cleaning face masks, special education kids, mask arguments on both sides of the issue, etc.

Superintendent Gilbert agreed that the mask arguments contradict each other; we are not experts, so we need to look at data for MHSD by maybe making masks mandatory for three-weeks and see what the data looks like. We don't have data because we were mask less this school year, so let's try it for 3-weeks and if it shows that it hasn't worked, then we are done with the mask debate. He went on to explain how the data would look. This isn't about eliminating COVID, it's about the numbers. Trustees Donahue, Binion, and Monasterio agreed with the exception that masks should not be worn during PE, recess, and for those special education students that have no masks or face shields in their IEP. Superintendent Gilbert stated that this is about keeping kids in school and reducing staff absences. He understands that no one including him likes wearing a mask. Chairman Abrego said that if have a mask mandate, there will be no quarantine unless a person has a COVID positive result. Trustee Donahue added that this doesn't mean the school district is agreeing to mandate face masks, it only means we are going to test the theory in order for the Board to receive data.

Chairman Abrego motioned to keep face masks optional and to eliminate the quarantine process, received a second from Trustee Knox. Chairman Abrego asked who was in favor. Trustee Knox and Chairman Abrego voted aye. He then asked those against and Trustees Binion, Donahue, and Monasterio all voted nay. Motion failed.

Trustee Binion motioned to have a 3-week mask mandate from September 9 until September 30 for the Board to receive data on the effectiveness of face masks with the exception of students in PE class, students at recess, and special education students who have an exemption in their IEP. Trustee Monasterio seconded the motion. Chairman Abrego asked all in favor. Trustees Binion, Donahue, and Monasterio all voted aye. He then asked who was against and Trustee Knox and Chairman Abrego voted nay. Motion passed.

Chairman Abrego asked for the Board to schedule a special board meeting to receive results. The Board agreed to hold a special board meeting on October 4, 2021, at 6:30 p.m.

VI. **ONLY WRITTEN PUBLIC INPUT (*Public Input Form*) WILL BE ACCEPTED**

*Those wishing to submit public input to the Board must use the [Public Input Form](http://www.mtnhomesd.org) ([www.mtnhomesd.org](http://www.mtnhomesd.org)) that must be received by the Clerk of the Board by noon the day of the board meeting. All public input forms received will be forwarded to the Board of Trustees but might not be read aloud. Please do not include the names of students or staff due to FERPA Laws and privacy protection. There will be no public input via zoom. If you have a complaint against personnel or students by name, you need to schedule an appointment with the Superintendent. Safety and healthcare measures such as the wearing of face masks and social distancing will be followed during a CDC or State or School Board recognized pandemic. There is limited seating in the boardroom so patrons might have to sit in the foyer or the overflow room.*

Chairman Abrego stated that he had six people for masks, six people against masks, and two for hybrid learning. Superintendent Gilbert said he had three people for masks, one against, and one to move to online education. Trustee Monasterio said he had two people for masks.

IV. **ADJOURNMENT** – All business of the Board having been completed, Chairman Abrego called for a motion to adjourn. A motion from Trustee Binion to adjourn was seconded by Trustee Donahue. Motion granted. Meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

---

Chairman Abrego

---

Clerk Whitman