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Knox Health Board mandates masks

By Mike Steely
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Wednesday's meeting of the Knox County Board of Health saw masks being required in most indoor businesses to flatten the surge of COVID-19 but the effort saw some resistance.

The board's involvement goes back to orders issued by Dr. Martha Buchanan in March instituting Phase One and then

Phase Two for the county. She seemed the only one in charge until June when the Knox County Law Department forced her to seek approval of the Board of Health.

The board then paused Buchanan's efforts and accepted Governor Bill Lee's "Tennessee Pledge" campaign. Last week the number of COVID-19 cases surged and, in an emergency meeting, the Knox

County Board of Health voted to require mask wearing in most public places, exempting state-financed schools and churches.

All of the board members, led by Dr. Patrick O'Brien and Dr. James E. Shamiyeh, voted to approve the mask requirements except Knox County Mayor Glenn Jacobs, who voted "No."

The board's action was strongly opposed at the meeting by

Deputy Law Director Myers Morton who called the action "unconstitutional, vague and unenforceable."

Not wearing a mask inside a public building could result in a misdemeanor charge and a \$50 fine or even jail time. Dr. O'Brien told the meeting he didn't want anyone to be charged and suggested issuing a warning. The ruling applies to business

owners, employees and customers.

The day before the board's ruling Knoxville Mayor Indya Kincannon issued a mask requirement for any city-owned or leased buildings.

The order took effect Friday but just hours after Wednesday's ruling. Knox County Sheriff

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KCS Task Force meets again to discuss students' return in fall

By Ken Lay

The Knox County Schools Community Task Force had one final public meeting to discuss options for reopening schools on Monday, June 29.

It was the second meeting and a follow-up to the initial meeting held on June 24 at the Sarah Simpson Professional Training Center.

In the first meeting members of the task force, which is chaired by Dr. Jerry Askew of Alliance for Better Nonprofits, mulled through data collected from an online community survey on the Knox County Schools website. The task force members were asked to come up with questions based on 150 pages of information. The survey had 30,000 participants.

The questions presented by members of the task force resulted in creating even more questions about reopening Knox County Schools, which were closed in March, in the midst of the spring semester.

"We were asked to react to and study the data," Askew said. "We were asked to come up with questions, and those questions have led to more questions."



PHOTO BY KEN LAY

Knox County Schools Executive Director of Student Supports Jason Myers addresses the district's Community Task Force at a meeting in South Knoxville last week. He discussed a multitude of issues including how to serve students with disabilities and health protocols as the schools prepare to reopen in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Askew will present the task force's findings to the Knox County Board of Education at its work session meeting on Wednesday, July 8. That meeting will be held at 5 p.m. at the Andrew Johnson Building.

Attendance will be limited due to physical distancing protocols. The meeting will, however, be streamed on the KCS website.

Knox County Schools Superintendent Bob Thomas will then make the decision on how

to reopen the district schools at the board's regular session meeting on July 15.

A wide array of topics was covered in last week's meeting.

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Masks, cameras, appointments at City Council

By Mike Steely
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Tuesday's City Council meeting, following an hour-long discussion on KUB's future, saw Mayor Indya Kincannon address her recent order requiring anyone in a city building to wear a mask.

The mayor noted that over the past two weeks cases of COVID-19 have doubled in the county and called that a "big uptick." The order applies to all city-owned or leased buildings and she said it applies not only to employees but anyone entering the buildings.

"I don't have the explicit authority but everyone one should wear a mask as a common courtesy," Kincannon said, adding, "I want to lead by example." The mayor added that anyone entering a city building without a mask will be given one to wear.

The order does not apply to children under 12 years old or people with a qualifying medical condition. She said the city would be putting signs up.

Later last week, Mayor Kincannon extended the mask order to all city buses and trolleys. If riders don't have one they will be given a mask.

She also said that a provider has been selected in the search for body cameras for the police department.

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Filling in the GAP

Grandparents As Parents take care of kids when Mom or Dad can't

By Bill Howard

Probably few would disagree that, while there are many different circumstances in which a child can grow up and do well, the best environment to be raised in is with two responsible and involved parents.

Of course, not every child has the luxury of living in such an arrangement. A number of events or circumstances can limit, or outright prevent, a parent from being involved in the child's upbringing. Some children wind up in foster care. It's well known

that the foster care system has a wide array of outcomes, ranging from being a God-send to a nightmare.

Other kids wind up with various family members, including increasingly, grandparents. In Knox County, as in other places, such caregivers have a valuable resource to help them. The program - Grandparents As Parents - is a part of the Community Action Committee's Office on Aging. GAP's program manager is Tracy Van de Vate.

"Grandparents As Parents

started 20 years ago, and the purpose of it is to support grandparents and other relatives raising a family member as their child," said Van de Vate. "It also could be an aunt, uncle, or sibling that is raising a younger sibling because of all sorts of reasons."

"We connect people to resources and services," Van de Vate said. "Before Covid-19 we had actual in-person support group meetings. Now we're doing a weekly conference call meeting so that they can connect with

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Mrs. Erma Stanley on her porch June 24. Ms. Stanley — or "Oogie," a nickname her father gave her — has been a GAP client for five years. She's been raising her 14-year-old granddaughter for about ten years. "The meetings they have are so beautiful," she said. "You're there with other people who are in the same situation." Photo by Bill Howard.

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