

Salt Lake County Council Votes Down Mask Mandate For Young School Children

KUER 90.1 | By [Jon Reed](#)

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Jon Reed / KUER

Parents filled the Salt Lake County Council chambers ahead of its vote Thursday, mostly in protest of a mask mandate in schools.

Facing a crowd that spilled out of the Salt Lake County chambers Thursday, council members voted down a mask mandate recommended by county Health Director Angela Dunn.

Most spectators showed up to voice their opposition to a mandate, waving American flags and carrying signs that said “Let Us Choose.” As the 6-3 vote drew to a close, the crowd erupted in cheers. Many joined in singing the national anthem.

Parent Candice Li said she was glad to see the council vote the way they did.



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"I feel that we as parents should have the right to choose what we want to do for our children or how we want to protect them," she said. "So to me this feels like I am being shown that I am an American citizen."

Dunn said she asked for the mandate to signal the gravity of the state's [COVID-19 situation](#) and to protect kids under 12 years old, since they are ineligible for the vaccine. Both mayors for Salt Lake City and the county backed the order.

In the run-up to the first day of school for county schools, council members said they had been flooded with emails, texts and even home visits from constituents both pushing and denouncing a mask mandate.

Council member Laurie Stringham said it was a difficult decision, but she ultimately voted against the mandate. She said on one hand she saw that masks helped reduce the spread of COVID-19 last year. But Stringham said in the end it came down to equity, which she defined as giving kids the best education possible with the least amount of disruptions.

"That's where I'm gonna vote today," she said, "is what I see as the most minimal disruption to these kids for both their health and their wellness and their mental health. I'm sure everybody here can make that exact same claim, they're just going to analyze the data differently."

While schools will still have to take [precautions](#) against the spread of COVID-19, the measures will look different than last year. Vaccinated students won't have to quarantine if exposed to the virus. Some districts are also suspending regular testing for sports and extracurricular activities.

Many parents say the state law preventing schools from issuing a mask mandate has hampered their ability to control the spread of COVID-19. Health experts in Utah, as well as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend both vaccinated and unvaccinated people wear masks inside.

Adam Cota, who has two kids under 12 in the Canyons School District, said the vote Thursday is now forcing him to choose between their health and education.

He said his kids spent all of last school year online and he doesn't want to repeat



private school that can issue a mask requirement.

“I think our politicians, our district leaders, they could have solved this, they could have created some different alternatives for us,” he said, suggesting one example might be to offer separate in-person classes for students with and without masks. “But it seems like they're more interested in fighting over political points than solving the issue.”

In a statement, Salt Lake County Mayor Jenny Wilson said it was unfortunate the council went against Dunn’s and other medical experts’ recommendations for mask use in schools.

“Going into the school year next week, my greatest hope is that parents will recognize the severe risk COVID-19 presents and choose to send their children to school in masks,” Wilson said. “Regardless, I want our kids to enter the school year with minimal conflict and disruption. It’s up to the adults to make that happen.”

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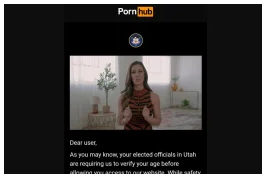
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