
SCHOOL BOARD MASK MANDATE: FACING CONTROVERSY AND ANGRY CROWDS

On November 22, 2022, Dr. Nili Kaplan-Myrth, a trustee of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB), introduced a motion to be considered by the Board of Trustees at a special meeting to be held that day. The motion argued that due to the spread of respiratory illnesses in the Ottawa region, and current strong recommendations by Ottawa Public Health for masking in indoor settings, a mask mandate must be put in place in schools. This motion attracted a lot of public attention, especially from students' parents—so much so that the meeting to decide on this motion was exceptionally well attended. There was a crowd of people in the meeting room. The atmosphere was electric, reflecting the public controversy surrounding the mask mandate in Ontario and Canada, well beyond the OCDSB. The wearing or the refraining from wearing of masks was an indicator of how the Trustees were going to vote on the Motion. Dr. Nili Kaplan-Myrth was wearing an N95 mask and what looked like yellow rubber gloves, which showed her determination to pass the mask mandate.

The disposition of the crowd was tense. Based on the prevalence of masks in the crowd, the ratio of those against the mandate versus those for the mandate was likely roughly 80:20. Some of the audience members wore the Canadian flag—a symbol of the Freedom Convoy of truckers and other protesters that came to Ottawa in winter 2022 to protest COVID measures, and also indicative of a strong sentiment against mandatory masking. The mood of those against the mandate was energetic, while those for the mandate were generally more subdued. One question that emerged was whether it was appropriate to introduce such a motion, and whether the school board would succeed in imposing the mask mandate.

THE ORIGIN OF THE CONTROVERSY

Ontario lockdowns

Since the emergence of COVID-19 in early 2020, there were four main waves that affected the Province of Ontario and the City of Ottawa. On March 17, Premier Doug Ford declared a provincial state of emergency under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act. The public-health response to this initial wave of COVID-19 was to implement a lockdown. This included closing most businesses, limiting social gatherings and closing schools. The lockdown was initially “sold” as a temporary measure to limit the spread of the virus so that the healthcare system would be able to respond. The use of the term “two weeks to flatten the curve” became widespread and entered the popular discourse. While the lockdown measures that were announced on March 17, 2020 in Ontario were marketed as intended to last for only a few weeks, most of the measures remained in place for more than 10 weeks.

Importantly, schools would remain closed for the rest of the school year, or a total of 15 weeks. There would be three more waves of lockdowns in Ontario, all of which would last longer than initially planned. School closures would last longer, as schools remained closed until the end of the school year in June. The last lockdown was imposed on January 3, 2022 for a period of at least 21 days. Indoor dining, gyms, movie theatres and schools were closed. All of the lockdowns included school closures, despite repeated claims that schools would remain open, given the importance of in-person education for the overall physical, mental and emotional well-being of students.

Ontario mask mandates

The initial public-health response in Canada to COVID-19 was that masks were deemed not to be particularly effective and thus were not recommended. However, this messaging quickly changed in spring 2020, as mask mandates were put in place for travelling by airplane.

Mask mandates in Ontario are under the purview of the regional public health authorities. Mask mandates were first imposed on the Toronto Transit Commission on July 2, 2020. Other municipalities quickly followed, with Ottawa imposing a “temporary” mask mandate on July 15 for all public enclosed spaces. The mask mandates were extended to schools for the fall 2020 school year. Mask mandates were sold as the “right thing to do”—to protect not only yourself but also those around you. Mask wearing soon became a symbol of social responsibility, with many people seen wearing masks outdoors when alone. Mask compliance in Ontario was extremely high (>95%). However, these mandates were lifted by the Province on March 21, 2022. Individual organizations such as school boards sometimes had their own mask mandates (for example, the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board imposed a mask mandate in April 2022, in contrast to the province).

COVID vaccines in Ontario

The COVID-19 vaccines became available in Ontario in December 2020. After a relatively slow rollout (with vaccination targeted at the very old and high-risk populations), vaccination was widespread by July 2021. In spring 2021, Premier Ford explicitly ruled out vaccine mandates. However, in September 2021, despite a vaccination rate of above 80% for the entire population, Ontario decided to implement a vaccine mandate. In order to go to restaurants, bars and many other public places, vaccination would be required. This measure was on top of previous and more targeted vaccine mandates that were imposed for health care workers, educators and other public-sector workers. Other employers in the private sector and the federal government would follow suit. Many people would lose their jobs or be put on unpaid leave for failure to comply. The imposition of vaccine mandates was reinforced by the public shaming of those who refused to get vaccinated, accusing them of being ignorant of science, defiant of public health and not caring enough about their fellow citizens. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said of those who oppose vaccine mandates: “They are extremists who don’t believe in science, they’re often misogynists, also often racists.”

Proponents in the public-sphere

There were the main-stream media and medical “social-media celebrities.” All of the major news outlets, including the CBC, CTV, Global News, the Globe and Mail and the Toronto Star openly supported the COVID measures. Moreover, they did little to question any of the policy measures taken during the COVID period, and in fact they actively suppressed contrarian views. In this way, there was a symbiosis between public health officials and the media to push one narrative and to discredit any others.

Some mainstream media appeared to go out of their way to belittle or shame those opposed to the measures, or to suppress/not report on studies or evidence that contradicted the mainstream narrative. For example, on August 26, 2021, the *Toronto Star*, one of the major newspapers in Ontario, included the following controversial quote from social media on their front page: “I have no empathy for the wilfully unvaccinated. Let them die.”ⁱⁱⁱ

One of the new phenomena of the COVID period was the emergence of the “Twitter doctor” or “Twitter public-health expert.” In Ontario, there were several Twitter experts (doctors, scientists, academics) who became daily fixtures in the media and on social media. These included Isaac Bogoch, Colin Furness, David Fisman, Nili Kaplan-Myrth and many others. They enthusiastically supported the COVID narrative without any reservation.

Opponent activists and alternative media

There were many people opposed to the COVID-19 public-health measures. In survey from January 2022, 30% of Canadians openly said it was time to lift the pandemic restrictions.ⁱⁱⁱ The opponents came from different walks of life, including religious leaders, physicians, university professors and even some politicians.

There were Canada-based alternative media outlets, such as Rebel News, True North, Liberty Dispatch (from a Christian perspective) and the world of Substack and podcasting that provide alternative viewpoints.^{iv} They actively report on studies or opinions that questioned the usefulness or legitimacy of many of the public-health measures and would provide a platform for those opposed to the measures to air their viewpoint. For example, in January 2023, Ezra Levant and Avi Yemini of Rebel News went to the World Economic Forum in Davos and confronted the CEO of Pfizer Albert Bourla in an impactful video that circulated widely^v, in which they accused Pfizer for making “millions [of dollar] on the back of people.”

The Freedom Convoy



In response to the imposition of a vaccine mandate on cross-border truckers, a large group of truckers from across Canada converged on Ottawa to protest the vaccine mandate and, more generally, COVID measures. The convoy that started on January 22, attracted thousands of people that occupied the downtown core streets opposite the Parliament buildings. The convoy protest received significant media coverage around the world and became an important symbol of resistance to COVID measures in Canada and in many other countries.



The government portrayed the protesters as far-right extremists and did not significantly negotiate with them. On February 14, the Federal Government invoked the Emergencies Act. Between February 17 and February 21, the protesters were removed by the police, effectively ending the protest.

The Convoy became a focal point to the frustration and anger of many people against COVID measures and a symbol of civil resistance. For example, some people attending the convoy were angry at the fact that people who chose to not get vaccinated were placed on unpaid leave (sometimes even though their organizations worked remotely online). They were also highly frustrated about school closures, mask mandates and what they claimed were distortions in how data around COVID was communicated to the public.

THE OCDSB MASK MANDATE

The School Board

The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) serves over 70000 students in the City of Ottawa, which is the federal capital of Canada and the second largest city in the province of Ontario. There are 143 schools—113 elementary school and 30 secondary schools (including Adult High School). The OCDSB also offers virtual school from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12. The OCDSB has over 9,000 full-time and part-time staff.

The strategic direction and policies of the OCDSB are set by the Board of Trustees. The responsibilities of school boards are set out in Ontario's Education Act. This includes to

- Promote student achievement and well-being, a positive school climate and prevention of bullying;
- Ensure effective stewardship of the board's resources;
- Deliver effective and appropriate education programs to its pupils.

The Trustees are elected to a four-year term through the municipal election process. There are 12 Trustees and two student trustees (the student trustees vote, but their votes do not count). The Board conducts its business through Board and Committee meetings. These meetings are typically open to the public (unless there are sensitive personnel or legal issues to discuss).

The key trustees in favour of the mask mandates were Dr. Nili Kaplan-Myrth, Lyra Evans (the Chair) and Justine Bell. The opposition was led by trustees Donna Blackburn and Lynn Scott, and student trustees Tabarak Al-Delaimi and Antong Hou.

Depending on the motion and the topic of the meeting, the board can invite external contributors to the debate. In the case of the motion on the mask mandate, they invited some health authorities to speak out in favor of the masking measure. This included Dr. Vera Etches, the head of Ottawa Public Health, Dr. Lindy Samson, Chief of Staff at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario and Dr. Raywat Deonandan, a Professor of Epidemiology at the University of Ottawa and a prominent COVID commentator (see their background in **Exhibit 1**).

The mask mandate motion

Mask mandates were officially lifted in Ontario on March 11, 2022, including in the OCDSB, to take effect on March 21, 2022. However, the OCDSB decided unilaterally to re-introduce the mask mandate in its schools on April 12, while other school boards in the Ottawa area did not re-impose mask mandates. Importantly, there was no expected end date. This means that people did not know if or when the mask mandates would end. The measure would remain in place until the end of the school year (i.e. in June 2022).

The 2022-23 school year began with no mask mandate, but there were soon repeated calls for the re-introduction of mandates at the provincial and municipal levels. On November 16th, 2022, Chief Medical Officer of Ontario, Kieran Moore, would not re-introduce mask mandates and stopped at saying that masks are only "strongly recommended." Interestingly, he was seen at a public event not wearing a mask on November 18, 2022.^{vi} In contrast to this trend of ending mask mandate, on November 22, 2022, OCDSB Trustee Dr. Nili Kaplan-Myrth introduced a motion to be considered by the Board of Trustees at a special meeting to be held that day, as follows:

THAT staff be directed to require, from an occupational health and safety perspective, use of surgical or N95 masks by all educators, staff, and students in all OCDSB buildings and in all OCDSB-led activity, with the exception of musical/performing arts instruction or sports in which masks cannot be worn, and with the exception of nutritional breaks;

THAT enforcement of, and consequences for violations of the mask requirement, will be subject to same operational rules that govern other OCDSB health and safety policies and codes of conduct; and

THAT the mask requirement will remain in place until such time as Ottawa Public Health declares that influenza season has ended in the City of Ottawa, CHEO pediatric ICU occupancy is less than 85% for a period of at least two weeks, and Ottawa Public Health no longer advises the public to wear a mask to protect against exposure to airborne and respiratory viruses in indoor spaces.^{vii}

Meeting 1: Confrontation with the crowd

The meeting was set to start at 6:45 pm on November 22, 2022, and to run for approximately 3 hours. The atmosphere was tense.

There were 11 Trustees in attendance and one online [verify]. Half of the Trustees were wearing masks (a mix of surgical masks and N95 masks). The Trustee responsible for the Motion, Dr. Nili Kaplan-Myrth, was wearing an N95 mask and yellow rubber gloves. The wearing or the refraining from wearing of masks was an indicator of how the Trustees were going to vote on the Motion.

The meeting room was crowded. It was clear that there was a great deal of public interest in the outcome of the meeting, as there was not enough room for everyone to sit (some audience members were asked to watch the meeting on a screen from another room). The audience was made up entirely of members from the public – ordinary residents of Ottawa. Based on the prevalence of masks in the crowd, the ratio of those against the mandate versus for the mandate was roughly 80:20. Those against the mandate sometimes wore the Canadian flag—a symbol of the Freedom Convoy. The mood of those against the mandate was energetic, while those for the mandate were generally more subdued.

The meeting was brought to order by the Chair of the Board of Trustees, Lyra Evans. Before the proceedings began, Evans, who was wearing an N95 mask, made an announcement regarding expectations around behavior by all those participating in the meeting or attending the meeting. She acknowledged that the issue was very contentious, and that she would not tolerate any abusive behavior: “Anyone who acted inappropriately would be ejected from the meeting”.

The Chair then called a series of “delegations,” which is the term used for persons who had applied to speak at the meeting. Each delegation would have two minutes to speak, to be followed by three questions of clarification by Trustees. It is important to note that the delegations who were health experts all participated virtually.

The delegations alternated between those who were against the mandate and those who were for the mandate. The meeting began with a delegation by Wade Shandley. Shandley, like the other delegations who were against the mandate were not scientific or medical experts. They were rather concerned parents who had children in the OCDSB. They made several arguments against masking, including:

1. Masking caused their children harm, such as anxiety, discomfort and depression.
2. Since most students (90%) were not masking, it is clear that the student population had already de facto “voted” against a mandate with their actions.
3. A mandate would be very divisive, creating further tensions among students, teachers and parents.

The crowd strongly applauded those delegations who spoke against the mandate.

In contrast, there were three delegations who spoke in favor of the mandate. They repeated the following messages:

1. There was no evidence that masks caused physical, mental or developmental harm.
2. There were “mountains” of “compelling” evidence that masking was effective.
3. The mask mandate would be “temporary.”
4. Stay up to date on all your vaccinations, including those for COVID and Influenza.

Many members of the audience were skeptical of the arguments made by these delegations. The claim of no harm was in contradiction to the lived experience described by the parents—as such, these parents felt gaslighted by the “experts.”

The crowd erupted for the first time during the delegation of Dr. Deonandan. The likely trigger for the crowd's outburst was Deonandan's claim that unless "something is done," by which he meant a mask mandate, "kids are going to die." The loud response from the audience prompted Dr. Kaplan-Myrth to try to assert control over the audience. She stated "I was not able to hear the end of his answer, could he repeat it again and have the room silent." Instead of remaining silent, there was a further outburst by the audience. This prompted the Chair to intervene to try to control the crowd. The Chair stated, "I understand that the audience has strong feelings about what is being said by the delegations. I understand that the members of the audience will have strong feelings by what is said by delegations regardless of which side of this issue you land on. Please refrain from yelling out; it's going to make this meeting take longer if we have to have all the delegations repeat what they have said."

Al-Shehabi, [a student trustee of the board](#), was asked by Kaplan-Myrth if she knew of any parents who had to keep their kids home because they were sick. Al-Shehabi answered just one, and then added that many parents had taken their children out of the OCDSB and put them in other school boards to avoid the mask mandates that the ODCSB had imposed last year. The crowd erupted in cheering and applause in response to Al-Shehabi's statement. As the crowd erupted, Kaplan-Myrth tried to assert control over the audience. She said, "Sorry, I can't hear her answer. Can you please be quiet so she can repeat it. Thank you. At this point, the meeting Chair Evans stated, "Trustee Kaplan-Myrth, I have to ask you not to chastise the audience." A few moments later, Chair Evans asked the crowd not to clap or cheer until the speaker is done speaking and that the audience should "police each other." This was said in a calm and polite manner.

The next delegation that spoke against the motion also received a loud round of cheering and applause at the end of his statement and after he answered a question.

Next, Dr. Lindsay Samson, the Chief of Staff of the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO), began her prepared remarks. She listed the four measures that were effective in reducing transmission and risk of severe outcomes from COVID. At this point, the crowd erupted again. Chair Evans tried again to quiet the crowd. "I really do not want to start evicting people from this meeting but if you insist on causing a ruckus I will have to. Please keep your voices down while people are speaking." Samson continued to speak, emphasizing that a mask mandate was not political. In response, the crowd erupted again and Chair Evans raised the stakes if someone disrupts the meeting "Security, the next time someone makes a ruckus can you identify them." Less than one minute later, there was another interruption, and security then asked the disruptive man to leave, which was reinforced by Chair Evans who stated calmly but firmly, "Sir, you are being told to leave."

The disruption continued, and a brief recess was called. The meeting reconvened, then Samson began to answer some questions from Trustees. In response to another question, Samson stated that the capacity pressures and wait times at CHEO were "unprecedented." The crowd again erupted and a woman is heard shouting, and then the Chair says "you are being asked to leave...if you do not leave, we will be forced to trespass you." The crowd makes more noise and then the meeting continued, and the Chair threatened to evict the people who were disrupting the meeting. Samson then stated that if your child really did require true emergency care, your child would be seen immediately. Around that time, some members of the audience were getting increasingly agitated and were speaking out loudly. The crowd then erupted again and the Chair said "Ma'am, you were asked to leave and then repeats "Ma'am, you were asked to leave and we will not be answering your question." The meeting was disrupted again, as the crowd was becoming increasingly loud and unruly. Trustee Bell asked for another recess "I would appreciate that our staff not be put at the front lines of this. Can we call a recess?" The crowd erupted in cheering and chanting, including slogans such as "Shame! Shame! Shame!" as well as the singing of the national anthem O Canada. The crowd is heard chanting and then the meeting goes into recess.

The meeting restarted without the audience, as the audience was escorted out of the room under a police presence. The remainder of the meeting was devoted to remaining questions for Dr. Samson. Dr. Etches, Medical Officer of Health for Ottawa Public Health, also made a written submission.

Trustee Blackburn noted that the three other school boards in Ottawa will not be mandating masking, nor is the rest of the City of Ottawa. Consequently, how useful would a mask mandate in the OCDSB really be if children are not required to wear masks outside of school? In response to critical questions, Samson repeated that we should take all measures possible, including masking, to reduce transmission of respiratory diseases and that “every little bit helps.”

Blackburn then followed up with the question: “if this situation is so dire as you say, why are you speaking to a school board of Trustees and why is not Dr. Etches or the Province mandating this and mandating it for everyone...?” Samson said she couldn’t speak to the actions of Dr. Etches.

The student trustee, Tabarak Al-Delaimi noted that her brother has autism spectrum disorder and is “non-verbal,” and so the way he communicates, makes sense of the world around him and understands his teachers is through their facial expressions and through reading their faces”, and so special needs students and educators know that masking is a problem, and thus is a mask exemption in these cases fair? Samson’s response was to “turn it around” and simply repeat that because some people cannot wear masks, anybody who can should wear a mask. Samson spent a total of more than an hour speaking and answering questions, compared to the 2-minute interventions for any other delegate. After what seemed like an endless debate among trustees, they agreed on the need for a second meeting.

Meeting 2: Motion failure





The second meeting was held two days later, on November 24, 2022. The meeting was held virtually. The official reason for not having the meeting in-person was that the OCDSB had a legal obligation under the Occupational Health and Safety Act to conduct the meeting without compromising the safety of all participants. Since the previous meeting required a police presence to maintain order, it was determined that the meeting could not be held in-person. It is possible that the stress and impracticality of dealing with a potentially disruptive audience was another factor that motivated that decision. This virtual format prevented active public participation in the second meeting, although members of the public were able to watch and listen online.



The meeting started with the exemption section amended by Kaplan-Myth and further amended to say that “students or staff with disabilities or to whom wearing a mask would pose a hardship or interfere with their ability to function as students or in their educational roles will not be subject to this mandate.” In this context, students and staff would be allowed to self-identify the hardship and to be taken at their word.

The two hours were spent debating amendments sections and arrived at a final version. Before the final vote, each Trustee was given the opportunity to speak to the motion. After each trustee expressed their opinion, the Trustees took a vote on the amended motion. Both student trustees voted against the motion (their votes do not count). The final vote result was six in favor and six opposed. With a tie, the motion failed.




EXHIBIT 1: KEY ACTORS*




Proponents

 <p>Lyra Evans, Trustee and chair of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board</p>	<p>Lyra is an environmental chemist and activist, having worked with organizations such as Kindspace and the Youth Services Bureau on helping LGBTQ and homeless youth. She experienced homelessness as a youth. She was first elected in 2018 as an OCDSB Trustee, and is thought to be the first openly trans school board trustee in Canada.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> She is proud of the fact that she "...was the architect of the expanded mask mandate for young students, as well as the vaccination mandate for staff, contractors, and guests...was also one of the voices in support of extending the mask mandate after the provincial government removed it prematurely from schools." https://lyraevans.ca/
 <p>Dr. Nili Kaplan-Myrth, Trustee to the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board</p>	<p>One of the most prominent "Twitter Doctors" in Ottawa is Nili-Kaplan Myrth. Kaplan-Myrth graduated from the University of Ottawa medical school and became a family physician. She began her media presence advocating for greater access to PPE for healthcare workers and the use of masks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> She gained much media attention promoting the uptake of the mRNA vaccines. She would publicize these vaccine clinics as "Jabapalooza", suggesting that vaccination was not an event to be missed. As a result, she was named an Ottawa Citizen "Newsmaker of 2021." During the COVID period, Kaplan-Myrth became an influential and polarizing figure in Ottawa, with some people praising her activism and others strongly criticizing her opinions and blunt style. The prominence that she has gained during the COVID period likely also facilitated Kaplan-Myrth's election to the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. Kaplan-Myrth established a large and loyal Twitter following, constantly advocating for the greater use of COVID-19 measures and restrictions. She gained much notoriety by appearing on a panel on the TVO program The Agenda wearing an N95 mask despite the fact that she was alone in her office. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9IG560sGE36 On October 24, 2022, Kaplan Myrth was elected as a Trustee to the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. Her first act was to introduce a motion to require masks in the OCDSB school system, which prompted the meeting in the case-study. She would lead the charge to re-impose a mask mandate.
 <p>Lindy Samson, Chief of Staff and Chief Medical Officer</p>	<p>Dr. Lindy Samson is the Chief of Staff and Chief Medical Officer since 2016, as well as a staff physician in the Division of Infectious Diseases, at CHEO (Children hospital). She is Associate Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Ottawa's Faculty of Medicine and is a Clinical Investigator at the CHEO Research Institute. She is responsible for organizing the activities of the medical staff and for ensuring the quality of clinical care and patient safety.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dr. Samson has very little online presence. She was brought to the meeting as an "expert" from CHEO to argue that CHEO was facing an unprecedented capacity issue due to RSV and that masking would help alleviate the pressure on the system. The assumption was that Samson's words would carry much weight in convincing the trustees that a mask mandate was necessary, but in fact her presentation triggered the shouting because it seemed "tone deaf."
 <p>Etches, Chief Medical Officer of Ottawa</p>	<p>Dr. Etches has been with Ottawa Public Health since 2009. She was appointed Chief Medical Officer of Ottawa in 2018. Etches was an avid promoter of COVID measures from the beginning of the COVID period. She delivered the following messages, repeatedly, in the media and on social media, throughout the COVID period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Masking is effective, and is a signal that one is doing their part; she mandated masks at outdoor public skating rinks; Public health measures are critical for reducing pressure on the healthcare system; COVID-19 does not discriminate.

	Etches would be the public face of public health in Ottawa throughout the entire COVID period.
 <p>Dr. Raywat Deonandan, <i>a health expert.</i></p>	<p>Dr Raywat Deonandan is an epidemiologist specializing in global health. His research focuses on the emerging global industry of so-called reproductive tourism and the epidemiology and ethics of assisted reproductive technologies and the exploration of novel avenues of medical education.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Deonandan has very been active on social media over the course of the pandemic, with frequent media appearances to push for vaccinations, vaccine mandates, boosters and the continued use of masks. He can be found on Twitter @deonandan and https://www.uottawa.ca/faculty-health-sciences/interdisciplinary/our-professors/raywat-deonandan
 <p>Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health for Kingston</p>	<p>Kieran More was the Chief Medical Officer of Health for Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington from 2017 to 2021. In 2021, he became the Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He presided over the rollout of the vaccination program for Ontario. • He set the policies and guidelines related to vaccine mandates in the fall of 2021 and the fourth lockdown in January 2022. • He presided over the implementation of most COVID measures in March 2022. • On November 14, 2022, in response to the rising incidence of seasonal viruses and pressure on the healthcare system, he “strongly recommended” that people wear masks – but added that each person should do their own risk assessment. • A few days later, on November 18, Moore was seen not wearing a mask at a public event and was unapologetic in response to the resulting criticism. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/dr-kieran-moore-no-mask-toronto-life-1.6656714 <p>The public health office of Ontario sets the tone for public health in Ontario.</p>

Opponents

 <p>Donna Blackburn, <i>OCDSB Trustee</i></p>	<p>Donna Blackburn is a four-term OCDSB Trustee. She has a BSW/MSW in Social Work from the University of Ottawa.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She is known for her “outspoken” style. In 2020, she was accused of discrimination in an incident in which she threatened a BIPOC student who was using a basketball court alone that breaking COVID-19 restrictions could see him end up in jail (and she waited for an hour for him to go). • Before the meeting, she was interviewed by the media and she stated that mask mandates were not needed and would only serve to divide the community.
 <p>Tabarak Al-Delami</p>	<p>Tabarak Al-Delami was a student Trustee for the OCDSB. She opposed the mask mandates on the basis that the majority students did not want to wear a mask and that a mandate would only lead to divisiveness.</p>
 <p>Antonh Huo</p>	<p>Antong Hou (Student Trustee). He also opposed the mask mandates on the basis that the majority of students did not want to wear a mask and that a mandate would only lead to divisiveness.</p> <p>Huo cited a survey conducted by the OCDSB that found that 70% of students were opposed to a mask mandate.</p>

 <p>Dr. Julie Ponesse, <i>University professor of philosophy and ethics.</i></p>	<p>A prominent anti-vaccine mandate activist was Julie Ponesse. She taught Philosophy at Huron University College for 20 years and is also an artist who paints pictures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the fall of 2021, her employer mandated vaccines as a condition of employment. She refused to comply, and so lost her job. She told her story publicly and emotionally, compelling much attention: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXe9AC9sfIU • Ponesse stood apart from the vast majority of the academia who actively supported such measures or silently did not oppose them. She opposed the Twitter Doctors, in that she emphasized that individual rights should not be compromised for the orders of public health officials. She would go on to work at the Democracy Fund. • The above video in which Ponesse tearfully says that she will stand on principle and not get vaccinated, therefore losing her job, went viral on social media. This generated empathy and admiration for Ponesse from among the people who opposed COVID measures. As such, Ponesse became a magnet, a perceived hero and a focal point for the frustration, anger that some people felt toward COVID measures. <p>Ponesse (and a few other social-media figures) became an informal “representative” of those who experienced loss due to COVID measures, especially vaccine mandates.</p>
 <p>Ezra Levant, Founder of Rebel News</p>	<p>Co-founder, owner, and CEO of Rebel News, an independent right-of-centre media company.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Levant founded the conservative magazine <i>The Western Standard</i>. • Worked as a columnist for Sun Media, and he hosted a daily program on the Sun News Network • Advocate for freedom of speech • Is a self-described libertarian conservative • Rebel News reported on the event and would later circulate a petition to have Nili Kaplan-Myrth removed as a Trustee (not only due to the mask-mandate issue, but also in response to the controversy around sharing bathrooms with transgendered students).^{viii}
 <p>Tamara Lich, Freedom Convoy leader</p>	<p>One of the leaders of the Freedom Convoy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former leader of the Maverick party and the Wild Rose Independence Party of Alberta (devoted to greater autonomy for western provinces) • Of Metis heritage • Lich was one of the main public faces of the convoy and was actively communicating on social media during the protest. • She was arrested and spent 49 days in jail before being granted bail

**Note that all these images were retrieved from from public online articles*

ⁱ <https://torontosun.com/opinion/columnists/warmington-opposition-shockingly-silent-on-pms-hatred-of-unvaccinated-canadians>

ⁱⁱ https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/when-it-comes-to-empathy-for-the-unvaccinated-many-of-us-aren-t-feeling-it/article_503732da-cbad-58e8-93d2-4f4f21f24407.html; <https://twitter.com/TorontoStar/status/1430869932590436352?lang=en>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://globalnews.ca/news/8611838/covid-19-canada-poll-leger/>

^{iv} There were also many non-Canada-based content producers, but here we will focus on Canadians.

^v https://www.rebelnews.com/caught_him_rebel_news_pummels_pfizer_ceo_with_questions_at_world_economic_forum

^{vi} <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/dr-kieran-moore-no-mask-toronto-life-1.6656714>

^{vii} <https://weblink.ocdsb.ca/WebLink/ElectronicFile.aspx?docid=8822015&dbid=0&repo=OCDSB>

^{viii} https://www.rebelnews.com/fire_nili