

Proposal

We are proposing a Board policy change that provides an option to allow staff to remove their mask for the purpose of presenting indoor library programs under certain guidelines.

Background

This proposal started with a discussion of children's programming and expanded to include all indoor in-person programs including book discussions and ELL. Now that the Executive Order and DHHS orders have been removed, we are working to return to the level and type of programs that patrons have come to expect from the library. In examining factors that affect quality outcomes for program attendees, we are being especially mindful of still being in a pandemic, and we are attentive to how programming parameters could affect vulnerable populations, especially the vaccine-ineligible group of patrons under 12 years old. One option to safely improve the programming experience is to allow program presenter/performers to remove masks while in indoor programming settings in order to improve communication and interaction with the public. We permit patrons to be masked or unmasked inside the library, but the current library board policy requires all staff to wear masks indoors.

Rationale

Allowing unmasked presenters provides the full scope of expression and enunciation important to all programming experiences. For example, children ages 0-5 take in most of their understanding through emotion and facial expression. Unmasked presenters also provide greater accessibility for patrons who have a hearing impairment or other auditory limitations, or are non-native English speakers.

The plan to implement this policy change includes the following components in order to ensure the safety of both staff and patrons:

- We will limit the number of attendees through registration.
- Sanitation stations will be provided at program entrance.
- The PA system is available for staff use if necessary to enhance presenter volume for a better patron experience in a distanced setting.
- Whenever possible we will use the largest space available to us for programs.
- The overhead air circulation system will be on during programs.
- When possible, exterior doors will be propped open during programming.
- Shared toys, puzzles and sensory bins have been eliminated.
- We will place markings on the floor for storytime and spaced seating to allow for greater physical distancing.
- Presenting staff will be 6 feet from patrons as recommended by the Center for Disease Control. A physical mark will indicate the distance.
- Staff must wear a mask leading up to the program, will remove it for the duration of the presentation or discussion, and replace their mask as soon as the presentation/discussion has ended.
- Only staff who provide proof of fully vaccinated status to Human Relations will be able to remove their mask during a program.
- No staff will be forced to remove their mask.

Research

We developed this proposal after gathering information from the public and affected staff members.

First, we developed a survey in Survey Monkey and using Orange Boy's Savannah, our CRM software that powers our newsletter, sent it to families with children ages 12 and under. We also posted the survey on our website, put a link in the newsletter and on social media.

The information gathered showed a wide variety of opinions regarding mask wearing. Many people are already comfortable coming to the library for indoor programming, and that additional physical distancing and masks wearing during programs would improve their comfort. On the opposite end of the spectrum, free form comments at the end of the survey showed that many parents prefer to make their own decisions about masks for their families during indoor programs rather than have the library dictate it to them. (*See Addendum for survey results*)

Then we consulted the programming staff and discussed how to increase their comfort levels when presenting programs.

Much like the outside world, thoughts varied. Many librarians feel comfortable presenting indoors if the same precautions are met (physical distancing and mask wearing). Others feel that even though they are presenting indoors, it is important to be unmasked to more clearly communicate with patrons; especially with childrens' programs and with younger storytime participants/families.

As we seek the safest ways to present indoor programming, we have determined from the findings above that a wide variety of programming format are essential. We are continuing to offer some programs virtually, in hybrid form, outdoors, and mask required programming for unvaccinated patrons.

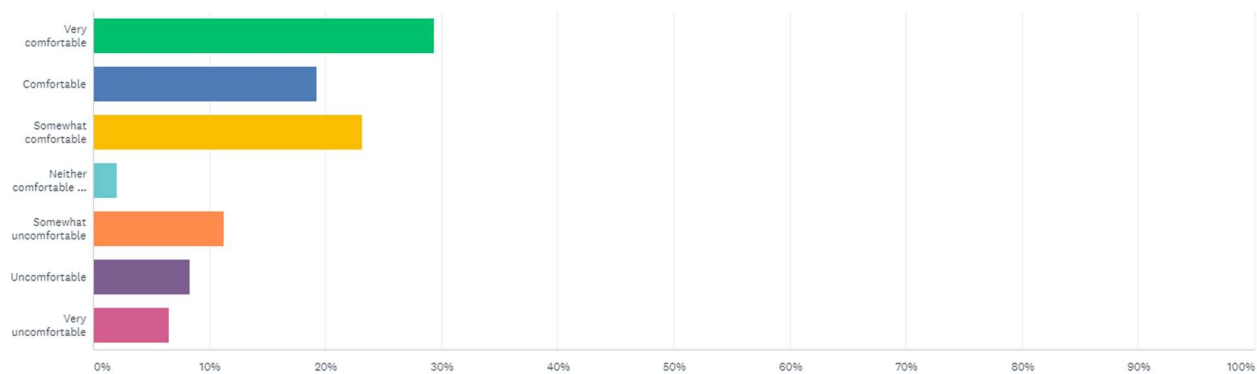
Recommendation

We are recommending that the Board approve a policy change to allow staff to remove their mask for the purpose of presenting an indoor library program. Staff would be required to submit proof of vaccination and would voluntarily remove their mask; no staff would be required to remove their mask if they do not wish to.

Addendum

How comfortable are you with bringing your child to the library to participate in indoor programs with other children?

Answered: 337 Skipped: 0

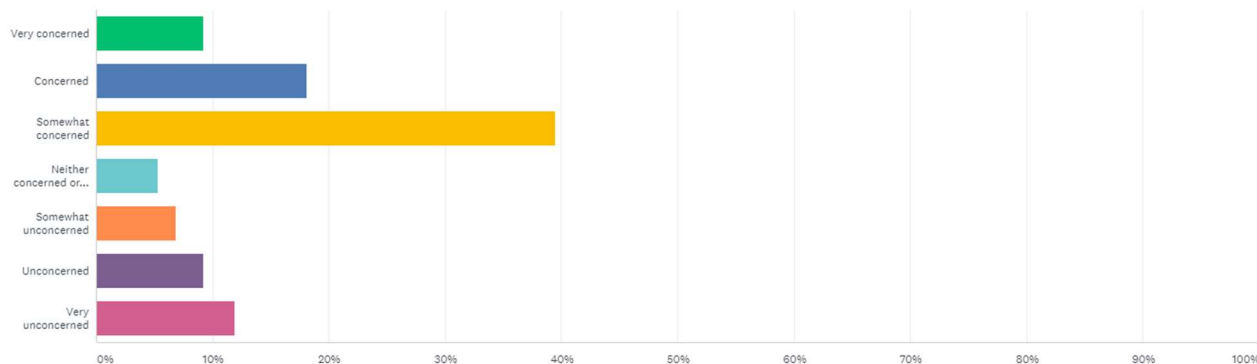


Children's Programming Survey 2021

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How concerned are you about the spread of coronavirus through in-person programs at the library?

Answered: 337 Skipped: 0

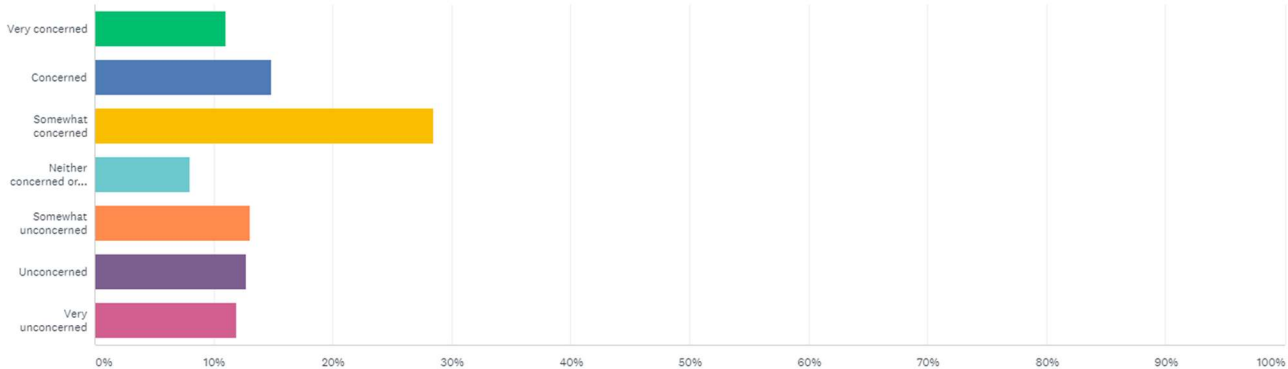


Children's Programming Survey 2021

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How concerned are you about the spread of coronavirus through shared toys, computers or other hands-on equipment at the library?

Answered: 337 Skipped: 0

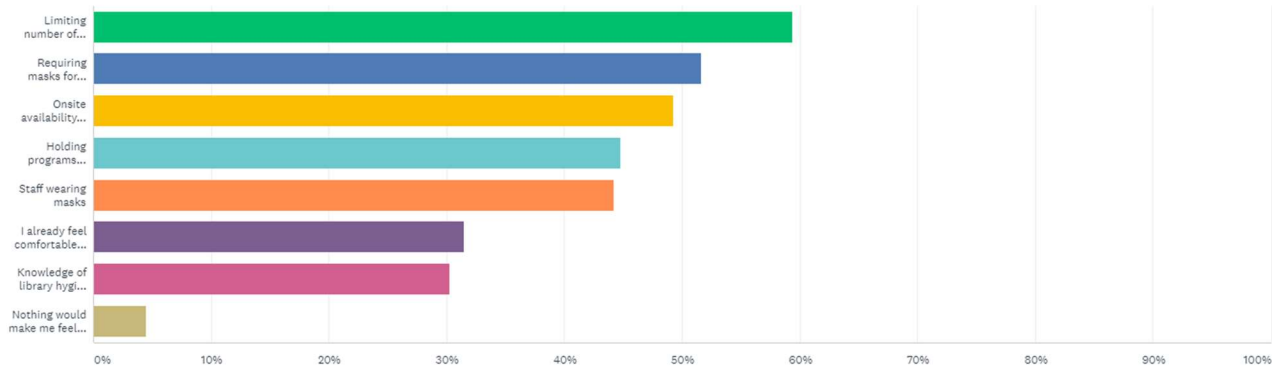


Children's Programming Survey 2021

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Which of the following would make you feel more comfortable bringing your child to in-person programs at the library? (Select all that apply.)

Answered: 337 Skipped: 0



Children's Programming Survey 2021

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