



Written by [Annalisa Pesek](#) on October 1, 2021

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COVID Hysteria: Kids Coerced into Testing at School

Kittitas, Wash. — In rural Kittitas County, Washington, school and public-health officials are radio silent in the wake of an atrocity at the Kittitas Secondary School that potentially violated child and parental privacy rights, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) rights, and Washington state laws of informed consent.

False reports from the Kittitas County Public Health Department on September 10 stated that an “uncontrolled COVID spread” threatened a 14-day closure of the Kittitas School District, whereupon radical teachers and administrators coerced a select group of students into mandatory COVID-19 testing on school property, with many children pressured to submit to testing without parent permission.

Pandemonium ensued at the school in the tight-knit, eastern Washington community on September 13, just days after the Kittitas School Board of Education announced it would *not* be enforcing Governor Jay Inslee’s statewide mask mandate. Concerned parents voiced their frustration at a recent board meeting on September 22, but as of this writing, the district has yet to update its COVID policies or publicly acknowledge the appalling actions of the Kittitas school staff and administration.

Students Segregated, Subjected to COVID Testing

The morning of September 13 began like any other school day, with students greeted at the school entrance by Dean of Students Ryan Hastings. Yet instead of assisting students to class, Hastings drew from a special list to direct select students to the school library. This mystery list of student names had been previously compiled by faculty and authorized by Kittitas School Superintendent Angela Von Essen.

“I got off the bus and was walking into the school when one of the staff told me to go into the library,” said high-school junior Cheyenne Dean, who was among as many as 70 students singled out that day and forced into the library to be tested for COVID-19.

Of the chaotic scene, Dean recalled people from the health department were “handing out forms for us to fill out so we could get tested.”

Dean’s mother provided the required verbal consent for her daughter to be tested, but Dean reported that several of her peers were tested without parental permission. Dean suspected she was chosen for the list because she didn’t wear a mask on the Thursday and Friday prior, though at that time the school superintendent and the school board had declared the district would not be enforcing the statewide mask mandate.





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“Some students believe I should be thrown out of school if I don’t wear a mask,” Dean said, explaining that new school guidelines state that after two warnings of not wearing their masks properly, students will be expelled.

Yet on September 8, Superintendent Von Essen, who has repeatedly pledged her commitment to the community to keep the children learning in school, took to social media to state the school’s position on the mask policy as thus:

“We are not sending our students home or singling them out for not wearing a face mask.”

Von Essen further told The New American that a recent parent survey showed “overwhelming” concern from parents who *did not* want their children wearing a mask all day.

Yet to many parents’ surprise, in the coming days, the superintendent would take a dramatically different course of action.

School, Health Officials Must Be Held Accountable

The chaos unleashed at the school comes just days after the district made local headlines for being the first to balk at orders from Olympia, as the Kittitas School Board of Education announced on August 25 at a school board meeting that it would *not* be enforcing Governor Jay Inslee’s statewide mask mandate.

During the meeting, Superintendent Von Essen promised that “if a student came to school without a mask, the school would not turn the student away,” reported the local newspaper the *Daily Record*.

Said Board Vice-Chairman Brian Stickney, “right now, the mandate is you have to wear it [the mask]. That’s the mandate but we don’t enforce, we’re not cops.”

Explained Board Chairman Mike Lowe, “when we think about mandates and what else is going on, don’t just think about masks and vaccines. Think about what else they are going to mandate us to do to teach your kids in the future, and holding funding over our head.”

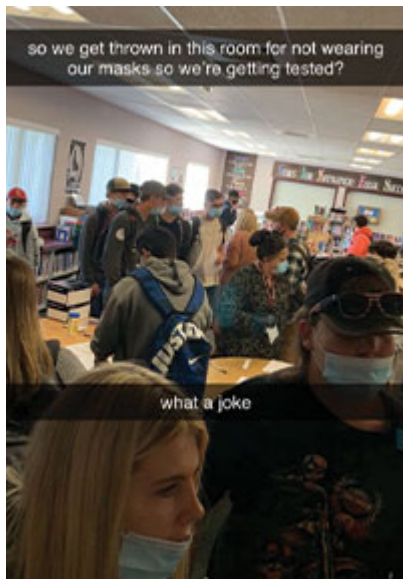
But then ...

Tipped off to the school’s refusal to enforce the mask mandate, Kittitas Public Health Officer Mark Larson publicly threatened to shut down the Kittitas school for 14 days, alleging an “uncontrolled spread of COVID-19” within the district on Friday, September 10.



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Singled out: On September 13, as many as 70 students at Kittitas Secondary School were sent to the school library to be tested for COVID-19, with many students pressured to be tested without parental consent. *(Photo courtesy of Naleah Boguslawski)*

However, neither Larson nor other health-department officials could provide details of the outbreak, instead referring all public inquiries to be filed through public-records requests.

Larson attributed the so-called outbreak to the first days of school, when “30 percent of students were not wearing masks,” according to a statement to the school. Yet per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), symptoms of COVID-19 only begin to appear two to three days after a known exposure.

Larson has zero data to support his metrics, which simply do not allow for enough time for any child who attended school on September 9-10 to have developed COVID symptoms, let alone constitute an “uncontrolled spread” of the virus.

Notably, the Kittitas County Public Health Department’s September 10 announcement reporting *18 cases of COVID-19 within the district* has since been removed from the agency’s website.

Moreover, questions that must be asked are: If the health department knew of an outbreak before or upon school starting, why did they not notify the community? Why did the health department fail to inform school officials, who could then alert parents of the outbreak? And why would only a select group of students be singled out, discriminated against, and required to test, and not all students and staff if the outbreak was indeed widespread?

The CDC has reported that vaccinated people can still catch and transmit the virus, but at the Kittitas school, vaccinated students appear to have been exempt from testing.

Faced with the threat of a school closure, Superintendent Von Essen may have considered Larson’s recommendations, which included:

- Full closure of school for 14 days, shortened to seven if all students and staff test at seven days.
- Send home all children and staff who refuse to mask.
- All unvaccinated students and staff quarantine for 14 days or seven days, with proof of a negative



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COVID test.

However, the school district proceeded with a plan of its own. In compiling the list, the superintendent, in concert with the board and school faculty, seemed to select only “mask offending” students to test for the alleged outbreak. But even that decision was not consistent, since several students who wore masks were forced into the library for the testing session, as was the case for Warren Taylor, who wore his mask consistently from the beginning of the school opening but was still placed on the list.

COVID Allows for Laws to Be Broken

Warren Taylor is among the many parents outraged that their children were segregated from the other kids and coerced into being tested. He said that his son “was asked if he had a permission form for the test from his parents. He did not. He was then handed a rapid COVID test kit, and instructed to perform the test on his own and fill out an information form to go with the test kit.”

Upon learning of their son’s experience, Warren and his wife, Marissa, immediately informed school officials that they did not have permission to perform a test on their son, citing the RCW (Revised Code of Washington) 7.70.065, dealing with “Informed Consent,” which protects him against unauthorized health procedures. Further, that the testing took place in a public setting, where students could see their peers’ test results, violates HIPAA rights, asserted the Taylors.

Marissa, who is the director of the Respiratory Therapy Department at Yakima Memorial Hospital and works daily in a critical-care setting with COVID patients, said the school was lucky she was 45 minutes away when she found out what had happened to her son.

“I will not tolerate anyone touching my child ever without my permission,” said Mrs. Taylor.

“What went on in that school is unprecedented and should be punishable in my opinion. Those people [school faculty and the superintendent] should be asked to step down and lose their jobs.”

“They violated human rights,” she continued. “They violated HIPAA, and they ruined my child’s trust in the school district.”

The Taylors are pursuing legal options “to ensure this type of rogue behavior doesn’t happen again.”

Following the incident, the couple issued a damning letter of concern to the entire school board and the superintendent, yet they received only a brief response from School Board Chairman Mike Lowe, who admitted “many things were learned Monday and corrections are being made,” suggesting the family’s questions be directed to the Kittitas County Commissioner’s office.

Testing, however, was sanctioned by the school officials, making Kittitas High School staff responsible for the outrageous incident.

In the aftermath of the mayhem, frustrated parents and concerned community members have begun to demand answers, claiming that the school not only has failed to acknowledge the illegality of the troubling incident, but also has still not communicated with parents and the wider community about the alleged COVID outbreak, nor discussed the much-needed changes to COVID protocols going forward.

Superintendent Spearheads Discriminatory “List”

When The New American requested the criteria qualifying a student for inclusion on the discriminatory list, Von Essen refused to comment.



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On Saturday, September 11, Von Essen had e-mailed parents about Larson's threats, informing them the school board had held an emergency meeting the night before to discuss the matter. According to Von Essen, at this meeting, faculty members discussed creating the list to include the names of students who were not masked Thursday or Friday, though on the list were several students with whom The New American spoke who said they always wore masks.

Von Essen's weekend e-mail to parents explained that "Dr. Larson agreed to our request to keep our schools open, as long as the District enforces the face mask mandate and tests students that did not wear a face mask on the first two days of school for COVID."

She went on to say that these select students to be tested must have "the parent or guardian's consent. Those students must be tested [both] on Monday and Thursday [and produce] a negative test result to stay in school."



Hands off our kids! Select students in Kittitas were given the Rapid Test, a.k.a. PCR test. Both the FDA and the CDC recognize that these tests provide a high rate of false-positive results. The worst part, however, was that the tests were given to students without parental consent. *(Photo credit: VioletaStoimenova/E+/GettyImagesPlus)*

The e-mail included a link to a consent form and stated that "the Rapid Test [would be] offered at the schools at no cost to the families," adding that "the administration will be available at each school to collect the consent forms and test students before they enter the building."

Unfortunately, many families said they did not receive the e-mail. It is not clear if the e-mail was sent to all district families or only those who had made the list. Outraged parents are demanding to know how these students were selected, and by whom. The answers thus far seem sparse and subjective.

"Staff who refused to comply with the mask mandate would face disciplinary action," said Von Essen.

Multiple attempts were made via e-mail and in person to speak with Kittitas Secondary School Principal Heather Burfiend and School Secretary Kathryn Goodrich, as well as other school faculty and school board members. Secretary Goodrich adamantly refused to answer questions in person.

Students Subjected to the Rapid Test

Kittitas students subjected to testing were provided the Rapid Test, or PCR (polymerase chain reaction)



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test, which consists of a sample swab of DNA that is run through cycles of amplification to achieve results. These tests have been widely criticized for providing a high rate of false positives, with even the CDC recognizing the flaws of the tests and recommending the FDA transition to another form of testing by December.

According to the FDA, PCR tests provide only 41-percent accuracy in asymptomatic people. To ensure accurate results, the PCR test must be run at an amplification of 17, yet often cycles are increased to twice that amount, lessening the accuracy by as much as 80 percent, depending on the cycle run.

Coming to a School Near You

“What happened here could easily happen somewhere else,” reminded Malisa Eggers, who urged a group of concerned parents and citizens gathering for an emergency meeting on Sunday, September 19 to share their experiences and brainstorm potential alternative approaches to schooling for their children, following the incident on September 13.

Eggers, an Ellensburg resident, grandmother of seven, and founder of the Facebook and Telegram group “Hands Off Our Kids,” decided to take action upon learning about the incident and, with parent Naleah Boguslawski, organized Sunday’s meeting. She said she hoped to provide a forum for parents and concerned citizens to come together and voice their concerns.

“Part of why the spotlight is on this town,” said Eggers, “is that Kittitas was one of the very first schools in the state to say they were not going to enforce the mask mandate.” Now it appears that the town has been made a target.

“Other schools that could have done the very same thing [testing the kids for COVID],” said Eggers, “well it hasn’t happened.” At least, not that we know of.

Richard Hink, a father of four who is running for town mayor, told the group that his child was not at school on Monday. Supposedly his son was one of the “18 cases” reported by the health department, which Hink claims was the result of testing the middle- and high-school football teams before school was in session.

“I still question [the test results],” said Hink, “because the person who administered the tests, the athletic director, himself tested positive, but he was the one who tested all the athletes. The person doing the testing is the one who tested positive to initiate the testing in the first place!”

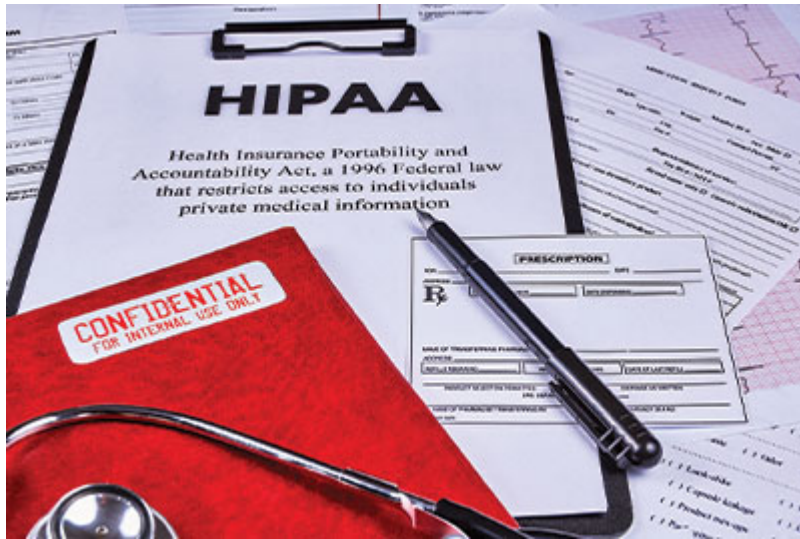
Hink explained that he had been “emailing the superintendent daily,” reading to the group from an e-mail dated September 14, in which Superintendent Von Essen states that the school board directed her to “tell the teachers to keep a list” of students who had not worn their masks and who would need to be tested on Monday. Hink has since filed multiple public-records requests with the school to obtain more details about the decision to test select students.

The absurd behavior of the Kittitas school officials and their conduct surrounding COVID testing should make all parents with kids in the government-run schools wary of the incompetence of the people at the helm of these institutions. Furthermore, all Americans should be asking how this testing data is being tracked, and for what purpose.



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Pay attention, parents: The testing of students for COVID-19 in a public setting, where students can see one another's test results, is a violation of HIPAA rights. Those responsible should lose their jobs. *(Photo credit: Maksim Shchur/iStock/GettyImagesPlus)*

On August 24, the Washington State Board of Health said it would continue to uphold an emergency ruling for coronavirus reporting, requiring doctors, healthcare facilities, labs, and local health jurisdictions to report all testing data to the U.S. State Department of Health. This seems to indicate that testing data is indeed being tracked and compiled in a national database.

What Next?

Certainly, the Kittitas school staff and the Kittitas School Board members, along with the public health department officials, have acted hastily and irrationally enough to create a firestorm that otherwise may have gone unnoticed. Weekend e-mails, coupled with a clandestine and predetermined list, make this incident particularly heinous. The community, in a seemingly conservative area of liberal Washington State, stands as a poignant example of the undermining of parental rights in public education.

Noteworthy is that most Washington school buildings are closed to parents and visitors during the school day, so students could be discriminated against based on so-called improper mask wearing and pressured into testing behind closed doors, subsequently impacting their ability to remain in school.

Parents in this small town and in towns and cities across America now face a difficult decision: Whether to pull their kids out completely and/or pursue litigation against the agencies and school faculty who put their children at risk while violating multiple state and federal laws. In Kittitas, parents are organizing and preparing to hold these elected officials responsible.

Annalisa Pesek is a writer, editor, and librarian. She joins The New American after spending nearly a decade in New York publishing.



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