

HENDERSON COUNTY BOARD OF PUBLIC EDUCATION
SPECIAL CALLED MEETING
MINUTES
January 4, 2021

The Henderson County Board of Public Education met in a special called virtual meeting on Monday, January 4, 2021, beginning at 12:00 pm, at 414 4th Avenue West, Hendersonville, NC.

Due to the COVID-19-19 Pandemic, this meeting was fully remote and followed the stipulations of School Board Policy 2302. The Board did not receive public comment at this meeting. An audio stream of the meeting was accessible to the public via a live stream link on the HCPS YouTube channel, <http://tiny.cc/HCPSlive>

Board Members Present: Blair Craven, Chairperson; Amy Lynn Holt Vice Chairperson; Robert Bridges, Dot Case, Stacey Caskey, Jay Egolf, and Kathy Revis.

Administrative Staff Present: John Bryant, Ed.D., Superintendent; Jan King, Ed.D., Assistant Superintendent, Curriculum & Instruction; Scott Rhodes, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources; Carl Taylor, Chief Administrative Officer; Rick Fender, Chief Technology Officer; and Bernie Sochia, Chief Finance Officer.

Dr. Wendy Frye, Director of High School and CTE, Matthew McMurray, Technology Technician

Attorney Present: Mr. Chris Campbell

Board Clerk: Mrs. Kathy R. Johnson

CALL TO ORDER

Board Chairman, Mr. Blair Craven called the meeting to order at approximately 12:00pm. Mr. Craven stated this would be a fully remote board meeting and that a live audio feed of the meeting would stream via YouTube for public access.

Mr. Craven asked for a roll call of everyone joining the meeting remotely. All School Board members were present. All senior staff members were present. Board Attorney, Mr. Chris Campbell joined the meeting. Board clerk, Kathy Johnson was present. Dr. Wendy Frye and Mr. Matthew McMurray were in the meeting as well. Mr. Craven asked everyone to stand for the pledge of allegiance.

AGENDA APPROVAL

Mr. Blair Craven acknowledged receipt of the meeting agenda and called for a motion for its approval. Mrs. Amy Lynn Holt moved that the agenda be approved as presented, seconded by Mr. Robert Bridges. (*Unanimously approved.*)

NEW BUSINESS

A. RETURN TO LEARN UPDATE – (*Superintendent John M. Bryant*)

Superintendent John M. Bryant shared the local health pandemic indicator numbers from the Harvard Global Health Institute. He reminded everyone that research data from the Harvard Global Health Institute (HGHI) indicates risk levels that are calculated based on daily cases per 100,000 people using a seven day rolling average. As of Monday, January 4, the rolling average in Henderson County was 95/100,000 people. This represents a large increase from the December meeting when the average was 24.3/100,000. Henderson County has recently moved to the 'Red/Critical' tier on the NC DHHS COVID-19 County Alert System with a 13%, 14-day Percent Positive rate. Dr. Bryant shared that community hospitals are seeing a surge in positive cases and hospitalizations. Health officials expect the upward trend to continue now that the holidays are behind us.

Dr. Bryant recommended that all students and staff move to Plan C, fully remote instruction, beginning Thursday, January 7, 2021. Students and staff would continue on Plan C until Friday, January 29, 2021. Dr. Bryant stated that the system will follow the guidelines established in August/September of 2020, when HCPS moved to Plan C due to Governor Cooper's mandate. Dr. Bryant stated the goal would be to return to Plan B for all K-5 students on February 1, 2021.

As in the beginning of the school year, Plan C remote learning will consist of live, virtual whole class sessions. Students will attend school remotely and simultaneously with their peers on a half-day online schedule with independent assignments for the afternoon. Daily attendance will be taken and student grading expectations will look similar to in-person expectations. Families that are unable to access remote learning digitally will be provided with either hotspot access and/or paper and text-based alternative assignments.

As in August and September, staff will continue to report to work in the classroom/on campus unless otherwise approved by their direct supervisors.

The district will continue providing reliable student meals during implementation of Plan C. As during the beginning of the school year, HCPS will provide grab-and-go pickup meals at no cost to children ages 2-18 at specific school sites and at scheduled “Meals On the Bus” stops. The “Child Nutrition Services on Plan C” Google Document will be shared with families on Tuesday, Jan. 5.

Child Care Services will also be offered to the public at select locations, prioritizing care for children of Healthcare Workers, Frontline First Responders, and Frontline Essential Workers (including educators, per the CDC’s most recent guidelines). Locations, schedules, and required registration links will also be shared with families on Tuesday, Jan. 5.

While operating under Plan C, HCPS will suspend updating the COVID-19 District Dashboard with school-affected cases, since in-person learning will not be occurring.

Since athletics are considered a voluntary extracurricular activity for students, and the N.C. High School Athletics Association (NCHSAA) has not issued any new guidance restricting activity, HCPS middle and high school athletics will continue at this time. The district will continue to follow NCHSAA recommendations for game play, including health department-directed screenings, contact tracing, and team quarantines if necessary.

The “Return to Learn” plans will continue to be evaluated and refined based on the public health in our community, and any additional changes and transitions will be communicated to staff. Per Public Information Officer, Mrs. Molly McGowan Gorsuch.

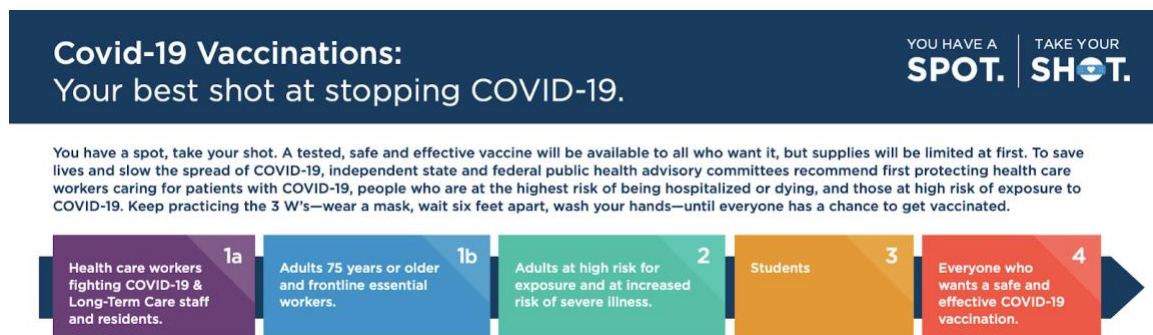
Dr. Bryant stated that he fully recognizes the troubles associated with a move to Plan C but feels this is the best decision to keep our students and staff safe. He feels this move could also help to stabilize our community health.

Mr. Blair Craven asked if teacher’s children will be prioritized for child care services along with the essential front line workers? Dr. Bryant replied, yes.

Mrs. Amy Lynn Holt asked if the hotspot issues we had in August/September had been resolved so our students could have access to the internet? Mr. Fender said that anyone who requested a hotspot has received one and he has approximately 1000 others ready to distribute when needed.

Mrs. Holt asked if athletics would continue on their current schedule? Mr. Rhodes stated there are no suggested changes to the athletics calendar at this time.

Dr. Bryant shared the following distribution information from NC DHHS on vaccines:



Dr. Bryant clarified that educators have now been included in Phase 1B, Group 2. Henderson County Health Department Director, Mr. Steve Smith, has the ability to move the county from Phase 1A to Phase 1B, when Phase 1A targets are met. There is no timeline in place for moving to Phase 1B.

Mrs. Kathy Revis asked if there is a timeline for our teachers to receive the vaccine? Dr. Bryant stated that the completion of Phase 1A is happening at different rates across the area. He could not give a specific timeframe for teacher vaccinations. He added that Mr. Carl Taylor, Chief Administrative Officer, will be our vaccine distribution coordinator for the county and Mr. Taylor will work closely with the Health Department to develop the plan for distribution to HCPS staff.

Board members asked questions about the logistics of the return to Plan C.

Dr. Bryant recapped the recommendation from the Leadership Team for Board approval:

- Plan C for all students beginning January 7, 2021 and continuing through January 31, 2021
- Monitor community health trends and workforce stability
- Continue district communications to keep parents and families informed
- Goal of transitioning to Plan B on February 1, 2021
- Prepare to bring back fourth and fifth grade students under Plan A on Monday, February 1, 2021
- Acknowledge that Plan A implementation will eliminate social distancing within classroom environments and on school buses for elementary school students

Mrs. Holt asked if the Board would be notified about workforce issues and how many staff members are not able to report to work throughout January? Dr. Bryant stated it is hard to know how many staff members may be on quarantine right now since they were not required to self-report over the break. He will be able to share the number of positive test notifications from the Health Department as we've done in the past.

Mrs. Dot Case and Mrs. Stacey Caskey asked about teachers working from home. Mr. Rhodes stated if a teacher was approved to work from home in August/September, they are still approved to work from home as long as they can fulfill HCPS teaching expectations. Mr. Rhodes stated that if a teacher has extenuating circumstances and would like to work from home, they can submit a Work from Home Request through the Human Resources Department along with doctor documentation.

Mr. Blair Craven stated that he has 3 children in HCPS schools and believes they are doing much better now since they returned to face to face instruction. Mr. Craven doesn't like the idea of moving children back to the all remote learning environment, however he feels it's the most appropriate decision to make at this time due to the current health situation. He looks forward to bringing fourth and fifth graders back to in person instruction on February 1. He urged the leadership team to monitor staffing issues during January so the Board will have the most accurate staffing data for the February 1 decision.

Ms. Dot Case thanked members of the community and teachers for submitting the 65+ letters of concern and support for the Board's decision. She stated that all letters were received and read. Ms. Case agrees that we should move to the fully remote learning plan at this time. She stated the CDC, Whitehouse Taskforce and the Harvard Global Institute all recommend enabling remote learning for all students at this time.

Mr. Jay Egolf agreed with the recommendation to move to remote learning at this time. Mr. Egolf feels that the overall death rates are still low with this virus and that data should be taken into consideration when decisions are made for our students and staff. Mr. Egolf is concerned that most of the letters received only focused on teachers and their health and not the quality of education students are receiving. Mr. Egolf feels that one month is too long to move to Plan C and he would like that time reduced to two weeks. He believes that K-5 students should be allowed to return to face to face instruction in Henderson County per Governor Cooper's executive order. He feels that kids should always be in school. He believes there should always be a virtual option for students to attend school and that parents should have the opportunity to choose between face to face or virtual instruction for their children.

Mrs. Stacey Caskey shared that after reading the letters she believes there is a big disconnect for teachers concerning the contract tracing and number of cases being reported in our schools. Mrs. Caskey feels our teachers

are not expendable and we have to consider everyone when we are making decisions for student return. She agrees that the best learning environment for students is for them to be in school. She acknowledged this is a once in a lifetime event and we have to put public health in the forefront. She feels virtual learning has been successful for her student and many others. Mrs. Caskey believes that teachers are professionals and they should be allowed to teach from home when appropriate.

Mrs. Kathy Revis stated that she read all of letters as well and her heart goes out to all of the parents and teachers dealing with this difficult situation. She acknowledged that parents depend on our schools for educating their students, providing childcare and many other resources. She feels that students will only miss 9 face to face meetings in January and that is a sacrifice that needs to be made to help decrease the number of Covid cases. She also agrees that face to face instruction is the best way to educate children. She thinks we all have to look at the big picture and if we take a pause now, hopefully we can get back to face to face instruction sooner rather than later. Mrs. Revis supports the recommendation from the Leadership Team to move to Plan C.

Mr. Robert Bridges stated that we didn't ask for this virus but we do have to deal with it the best we can. Mr. Bridges complimented the administrative team for trying their best to meet as many needs as possible. He feels the Board and the administration must make the best decisions they can for our students and to benefit the community. He feels there are no good answers but has confidence that our leadership team is doing the best job they can dealing with the virus.

Mr. Craven stated that K-3 students will miss 16 days of face to face instruction / 7 days for alternating A/B day students with the move to Plan C in January.

Mr. Egolf asked if it was possible for him to vote for a move to Plan C for only two weeks, instead of one month? Mr. Craven said that Board members can state any motion they want for Board consideration.

Mr. Craven called for a motion on the recommendation on the floor:

- Plan C for all students beginning January 7, 2021 and continuing through January 31, 2021
- Goal of transitioning to Plan B on February 1, 2021
- Prepare to bring back fourth and fifth grade students under Plan A on Monday, February 1, 2021

Mr. Robert Bridges made a motion for Henderson County Schools to move to fully remote instruction beginning January 7 and lasting through January 31, 2021, with a Goal of transitioning to Plan B on February 1, 2021 while preparing to bring back fourth and fifth grade students under Plan A on Monday, February 1, 2021, as presented.

Ms. Dot Case seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken: Mrs. Caskey, Yes; Ms. Case, Yes; Mrs. Holt, Yes; Mr. Bridges, Yes; Mrs. Revis, Yes; Mr. Egolf, Yes; Mr. Craven, Yes. The motion was unanimously approved.

The board approved the transition to Plan C. Students will return to class on Thursday, January 7 under the fully remote model. HCPS will operate under Plan C through at least January 31, with the goal of resuming hybrid and in-person learning on February 1. As discussed in December, January's regularly scheduled school board meeting will consider implementing Plan A (fully in-person) for grades K-5 and Plan B (hybrid) for grades 6-12 on February 1. At approximately 12:51pm, Mr. Craven called for a motion to adjourn. Mrs. Amy Lynn Holt made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Kathy Revis.

A roll call vote was taken: Mrs. Caskey, Yes; Ms. Case, Yes; Mrs. Holt, Yes; Mr. Bridges, Yes; Mrs. Revis, Yes; Mr. Egolf, Yes; Mr. Craven, Yes. The motion was unanimously approved.