

Henderson County Board of Public Education
SPECIAL CALLED MEETING
MINUTES
March 12, 2021

The Henderson County Board of Public Education held a special called meeting on Friday, March 12, 2021, beginning at 10:00 am, at 414 4th Avenue West, Hendersonville, NC.

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the March 12, 2021 special called business meeting was held in accordance with approved safety thresholds for public gatherings established by local health officials and Governor Roy Cooper. Capacity for the public/staff to attend was no more than 25 persons. Therefore, limited members of the public were allowed into the meeting room. The Board received public comment during the meeting and via email submitted prior to the meeting. All Public Comment emails were shared with each board member prior to the meeting and then posted to the HCPS website for public access on March 12, 2021. The meeting was accessible to the public via a livestream link at, <http://tiny.cc/HCPSlive>.

Board Members Present:	Blair Craven, Chairperson; Amy Lynn Holt, Vice Chairperson; Robert Bridges; Dot Case; and Jay Egolf
Remote Attendance:	Stacey Caskey, Kathy Revis
Administrative Staff Present:	John Bryant, Ed.D., Superintendent; Wendy Frye, Ed.D., Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction; Mr. Scott Rhodes, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources; Rick Fender, Chief Technology Officer; Bernie Sochia, Chief Finance Officer and Carl Taylor, Chief Administrative Officer
Attorney Present:	Mr. Dean Shatley
Board Clerk:	Mrs. Kathy R. Johnson

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Blair Craven called the meeting to order at approximately 10:00am and led all those in attendance in the pledge of allegiance.

AGENDA APPROVAL

Mr. Blair Craven acknowledged the remote attendance of Dr. Kathy Revis and Mrs. Stacey Caskey. Dr. Revis and Mrs. Caskey verbally acknowledged their attendance in the meeting.

Mr. Blair Craven acknowledged receipt of the meeting agenda and asked for a motion to approve. Mrs. Amy Lynn Holt moved that the agenda be approved as presented. Seconded by Mr. Robert Bridges. *(Unanimously approved.)*

A roll call vote was taken: Mr. Bridges, Yes; Ms. Case, Yes; Mrs. Holt, Yes; Mr. Egolf, Yes; Mrs. Caskey, Yes; Dr. Revis, Yes; Mr. Craven, Yes. *(Unanimously approved.)*

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Blair Craven stated that around 20 pre-submitted public comments were received for the March 12, 2021 meeting. All emails were shared with Board members prior to the meeting and will be posted to the Henderson County Board of Public Education website for public access after the meeting. There were no in-person public comments presented.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Approval – Return to Learn Plan Update – *(Dr. John M. Bryant, Superintendent)*

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 March 12, the rolling average in Henderson County was 23.1/100,000 people. Henderson County is in the Significant/Yellow tier on the NC DHHS County Alert System Report.

Dr. Bryant shared that on Wednesday, March 10, 2021, there was an announcement from the NC General Assembly regarding proposed compromise legislation to reopen schools in North Carolina. Senate Bill 220 (SB220) was ratified and signed into law by Governor Roy Cooper on Thursday, March 11, 2021. SB220 legislation allows Grades 6-12 to operate under either Plan A or Plan B for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year. This is extremely significant because it is the first opportunity for Grades 6-12 to move to Plan A since March of 2020. Dr. John Bryant shared the requirements of SB220:

- Requires all elementary schools to open under Plan A
- Allows middle and high schools to open under Plan A or Plan B (Plan C is not an option)
- Requires middle and high schools that open under Plan A to notify DHHS and describe their plan to open safely (DHHS does not have the authority to veto a plan)
- Becomes effective 21 days after the bill becomes law (April 1)
 - Districts ready to open sooner do not have to wait the 21 days
 - School districts may add teacher workdays between the time the bill becomes law and schools reopen
- Requires students with an IEP or 504 plans to have the option of Plan A, at the discretion of the student's parent or guardian
- Maintains the Governor's authority to close schools on a district-by-district basis
- Gives local districts authority to close a school due to an outbreak or quarantine
- Requires middle and high schools that open under Plan A to partner with the ABC Science Collaborative to collect data related to reopening schools
 - Allocates \$500,000 from the 10% DPI reserve of federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief II (ESSER II) funds for this study
- Requires a virtual instruction option to be provided to families

Dr. Bryant stated that we will continue to follow the StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit and expects an updated document next week due to the newly approved legislation. Dr. Bryant stated that the District Dashboard is still active. New school-affected cases are reported the business day after the positive case is confirmed, with updates at 9 a.m. Any school-affected clusters will be reported to the NCDHHS by the local health department and updated on the NCDHHS dashboard. HCPS will send cluster notifications to staff and families of all schools and to the community through all available communication channels.

Dr. Bryant shared global vaccination efficacy percentages for the current Covid-19 vaccines: Moderna vaccine (92% effective after 1st dose and after 14 days) and Pfizer vaccine (92.6% effective after 1st dose and after 14 days.) Dr. Bryant spoke with Mr. Steve Smith, Director of the Henderson County Department of Health, prior to the meeting and Mr. Smith stated he had no concerns with regards to HCPS employee vaccination participation and students returning to class prior to teachers receiving their second dose of vaccine. Dr. Bryant said that under SB220 local boards of education shall have the authority to make day-to-day decisions concerning whether shifting individual schools or individual classrooms that are providing in-person instruction to remote instruction is necessary due to COVID-19 exposures that result in insufficient school personnel or required student quarantines.

Dr. Bryant made the following recommendation for Board consideration:

- Continue Plan A for all elementary students [K-G5] for the remainder of the school year
- Transition to Plan A for all middle/high students [G6 - G12] on Monday, March 22, 2021
- Required Teacher Workday [MS/HS] on Wednesday, March 17, 2021 for facility preparation and staff planning
- Monitor community health trends and workforce stability
- Continue district communications to keep parents and families informed

Dr. Bryant shared the following Instructional Description for [G6 - G12] on Plan A

- All students [G6-G12] return to regular "bell schedule"

- Live, remote instruction option remains
- Guidelines for attendance stay the same
- Students affirm face-to-face instruction or RLO enrollment by end of day, Wednesday, March 17

Dr. Bryant reiterated that all Return to Learn plans continue to be fluid models and are contingent on local health data and that we will continue to respond to questions, concerns, and updated direction from NCDPI, NCDHHS, and other state governing bodies. Dr. Bryant stated, we will continue meeting the instructional obligation to all students every day.

Mr. Craven asked if the recommended one teacher workday would be sufficient for middle and high school teachers to prepare for the transition? Dr. Bryant stated that if the Board agreed to an additional day, his leadership team would support that recommendation.

Mr. Craven asked Dr. Bryant why he wanted grades 6-12 to transition so quickly to Plan A beginning the week of March 22? Dr. Bryant stated this would give grades 6-12 students three weeks of in-person, face to face instruction prior to the Spring Break (April 5-9.) This start date would also allow these students to have close to a full semester of in-person learning before the end of the year. Several board members shared their concerns with HCPS staff not having their second vaccination dose by the recommended transition date. Dr. Bryant restated his conversation with Health Department Director, Mr. Steve Smith regarding the vaccination efficacy numbers and stated Mr. Smith shared no concerns with the proposed start date.

Mrs. Stacey Caskey suggested two teacher workdays might be needed for staff members to prepare for the transition and then she shared her concerns that teachers may have adverse effects when they receive their second dose of the vaccination. She asked what if teachers cannot come to work? Dr. Bryant stated that the vaccinations were carefully scheduled on Friday and Saturday to allow opportunity for staff recovery. Mrs. Caskey asked if teachers would be required to use their accumulated sick leave if they didn't feel well enough to return to work the day(s) after their second dose? Board attorney, Mr. Dean Shatley, stated there is no special provision from the state for these types of absences, like there was for staff who were required to quarantine. Mr. Shatley stated that teachers would be required to use their sick leave if they were not able to come to work.

Dr. Kathy Revis suggested that we move the recommended teacher workday from Wednesday, March 17 to Friday, March 19, allowing two days of instruction for A/B day students within that week. Then, we could add the second teacher workday to Monday, March 22. This would move the Plan A start date for grades 6-12 to Tuesday, March 23, 2021. Board members discussed the logistics with Dr. Bryant and felt this was a viable suggestion.

Mr. Dean Shatley stated that Henderson County has already met the requirements of SB220 other than, *'Requires students with an IEP or 504 plans to have the option of Plan A, at the discretion of the student's parent or guardian.'* Mr. Shatley stated the system is in good shape as the Board considers the recommendation for Grades 6-12 to transition to Plan A and that HCPS can meet the special education requirements as well.

SB220 states that *"Local boards of education that offer Plan A to students enrolled in grades six through 12 shall, before beginning Plan A instruction, notify the Department of Health and Human Services and describe the unit's plan for moving to Plan A. A local board which operates under Plan A shall partner with the ABC Science Collaborative of the School of Medicine at Duke University (ABC Collaborative) to allow the ABC Collaborative to collect and analyze data from those units for students in Plan A in grades six through 12."* Dr. Bryant stated he has crafted a draft letter containing this information to be sent to DHHS upon Board approval.

Mr. Blair Craven made a motion for Grades 6-12 to move to Plan A beginning Tuesday, March 23, 2021. He added, Friday, March 19 and Monday, March 22 will now be required workdays for teachers to prepare for the student transition. The motion also included a modification to the A/B day student schedule for the week of March 15, 2021 to allow for four days of instruction prior to the Friday workday (A-day students should attend Monday and Wednesday; B-Day students should attend Tuesday and Thursday.) Mr. Craven's motion included giving the

Superintendent authority to make changes to daily school routines as necessary for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year. Mr. Jay Egolf seconded the motion. Mr. Craven opened the floor for further discussion.

Ms. Dot Case stated that she is not in favor of the motion and suggested the Board of Education members visit the middle and high schools to see how cramped the hallways are and how close students will be when we send them all back on Plan A. Ms. Case also shared her concerns about teacher safety as teachers will not be fully vaccinated when students return. Mr. Craven stated that the Board is aware of how little social distancing will occur on Plan A. He added, we may also have more students choose to return for face-to-face instruction instead of remaining on all virtual platform. Dr. Bryant agreed that this motion will allow middle and high school teachers more time to prepare for the transition to Plan A.

Mr. Jay Egolf stated that the Covid-19 virus is not going away and we need to find a way for our children and staff to move forward.

After final discussion, Board Chair, Mr. Blair Craven called for a roll call vote on the motion on the floor: Mr. Bridges, Yes; Ms. Case, No; Mrs. Holt, Yes; Mr. Egolf, Yes; Mrs. Caskey, Yes; Dr. Revis, Yes; Mr. Craven, Yes. *(The motion passed 6-1.)*

Summary of Plan A transition for Grades 6-12:

Tuesday, March 23, grades 6-12 will join elementary students in attending school in-person five days a week following their school's "regular bell schedule," unless their families have chosen the fully remote model.

Grades 6-12 will continue operating under Plan B next week (March 15-19), under a modified schedule: *Monday, March 15, and Wednesday, March 17, are "A" days for middle and high school students in Group A, and Tuesday, March 16, and Thursday, March 18, are "B" days for those in Group B. Friday, March 19, and Monday, March 22 will be Required Teacher Workdays in middle and high schools for the facility preparation and staff planning necessary to bring all students back onto campuses.* There are no changes in the existing elementary school schedules under Plan A.

Families may still choose to have their middle and high school students attend school through the fully remote Engage RLO model, which will also follow the traditional 8 a.m.-3 p.m. school day for grades 6-12. Following the bell schedule from home means remote middle and high school students will need to be available to teachers during their typical class periods, and teachers will provide balanced engagement.

Under Plan A, standard bus transportation and Child Nutrition operations will resume. Although 6 feet of social distancing is not required under Plan A, schools will continue to follow the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services' (NCDHHS) guidelines for "minimal social distancing," by marking 6 feet of spacing in high traffic areas, encouraging physical distancing among students and staff, and limiting nonessential visitors and activities in schools. Plan A requirements also include wearing face coverings in schools and on buses, frequent hand washing, and daily temperature screenings for all individuals entering school buildings.

While operating under Plan A, HCPS will continue updating the COVID-19 District Dashboard with school-affected cases reported while in-person learning is occurring on campuses.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Mrs. Amy Lynn Holt moved that the meeting be adjourned. Seconded by Mr. Jay Egolf. *(Unanimously approved at 11:13am.)*

Minutes approved: April 12, 2021