

**Henderson County Board of Public Education**  
SPECIAL CALLED MEETING  
MINUTES  
August 2, 2021

The Henderson County Board of Public Education held a special called meeting on Monday, August 2, 2021, beginning at 9:00 am, at 414 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue West, Hendersonville, NC.

The Board received public comment via email prior to the meeting and during open session. 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 August 2, 2021. The meeting was accessible to the public via a livestream link at, <http://hcpsnc.org/live>.

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; 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: Chris Campbell

Board Clerk: Stephanie Alfrey

#### CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Blair Craven called the meeting to order at approximately 9:03am and led all those in attendance in the pledge of allegiance.

#### AGENDA APPROVAL

Mr. Blair Craven noted around 20 in person public comment submissions were submitted. Due to the number of submissions, each speaker will have two minutes to speak. Mr. Craven acknowledged receipt of the meeting agenda and asked for a motion to approve. Mrs. Amy Lynn Holt moved that the agenda be approved with an additional of item B to discuss athletic eligibility for the first semester. Seconded by Mr. Jay Egolf. (*Unanimously approved.*)

#### PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Blair Craven stated that around 77 pre-submitted public comments were received for the August 2, 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.

Mary Beth Johnson spoke of concerns that have come up during the COVID-19 pandemic regarding more than just mask mandates.

Janice Parker talked about how the U.S. government has lied to the American people about other epidemics.

Brenda Blaylock spoke of the effect wearing masks has on children and thinks children should be unmasked.

Bob Moskes talked about how masks do not work and asked for masks to be optional.

Rebekah Byrd spoke of her son who can't wear a mask due to health issues and the negative effects masks has on people. She asked for masks to be optional this school year.

Priscilla Montelongo, a HCPS student, said she was virtual all last year because masks were mandated. This school year, she and her cousins will be virtual again if masks are still mandated.

Barbara McInerney talked about why masks need to be mandated in the schools for the health of children as well as preventing workforce issues when parents have to miss work to care for children who have been quarantined.

Sara Kim, a HCPS student, spoke of the difficulties wearing a mask presents as a student. She mentioned the mental health issues it causes students in middle and high school because people rely on the facial expressions of others while in conversation.

Alyssa N. talked about why masks should be a parent's choice for his/her child and not mandated.

Daniel Andreotta, County Commissioner for Henderson County, spoke about why masks should not be required in schools.

Shelia Dale talked about her concerns over the mask mandate and Critical Race Theory (CRT).

Cassie Owen, a HCPS employee, asked for masks to be optional. She wants to see the faces of the children she teaches this year. She spoke of the hardship of masks in the classroom.

Vicki Huntley talked about how difficult school with masks has been for her daughter who can't hear. She asked the Board to make masks optional.

Canyon Lindsey, a HCPS student, spoke of pros and cons to masks. He said he doesn't want to start middle school with a mask requirement and asked for masks to be optional.

Brooke Ballard a teacher for HCPS, spoke of the science of masks from JAMA. While she respected the mask mandate last year, she is asking for masks to be a choice this school year.

Vance McCraw spoke of how masks do not stop COVID-19 from spreading and feels masks should be optional.

James Blaylock said the case of not requiring masks had already been made. He implored the Board to make masks optional.

Ryan Koch spoke about the argument over masks and who we need to love each other.

David Noch talked about why masks are health risks and feels masks should be optional in schools.

Melissa Mullin talked about why masks should be mandated in schools.

Elizabeth Holzschuh spoke of the difficulties for her autistic son to learn virtually and to wear a mask. She supports masks being optional.

Mr. Jay Egolf noted that he appreciates the Board meeting at the early hour because he is going out to town today and it's the only way you could attend in person.

## 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 July 31, the rolling average in Henderson County was 23.8/100,000 people. Henderson County is in the Low/Green tier on the NC DHHS County Alert System Report as of July 22.

Dr. Bryant shared the StrongSchools NC Public Health Toolkit (K-12) was updated on July 21. The Toolkit reads "The StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit was updated on July 21 to align to the CDC Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools updated on July 9, 2021. To allow for operational transition time, the provisions of this Toolkit are effective July 30th at 5pm."

The language in the Toolkit now reads should or could instead of requirements. This language gives school systems the ability to choose the recommendations in the Toolkit.

Summary of the major updates to the Toolkit from the previous version:

- Each section of the Toolkit has been organized into categories that prioritize implementation of the strategies that have been shown to be most effective in lowering the risk of COVID-19 exposure and spread in school sessions and school activities.
- Strategies that SHOULD be implemented by all schools. These are strategies that, if not implemented, create conditions of high risk for COVID-19 exposure and spread. NCDHHS strongly advises that school leaders adopt all the strategies in the SHOULD sections.
- Strategies that school leaders COULD CONSIDER adopting. These are strategies to provide additional layers of prevention and that, if implemented, will further reduce the risk of COVID-19 exposure and spread.
- Added information on offering and promoting COVID-19 vaccination.
- Revised to emphasize the COVID-19 prevention strategies most important for in-person learning for K12 schools - most importantly, promoting vaccinations and proper and consistent use of face coverings.
- Added language on the importance of offering in-person learning, regardless of whether all the prevention strategies can be implemented at the school. For example, students should not be excluded from full-time, in-person learning to accommodate physical distancing. Instead, other prevention strategies, in particular consistent and proper masking, should be used.

- Updated to align with guidance for fully vaccinated people.
- Added additional guidance on testing strategies
- Added modified quarantine guidance for students after a close contact in which both people were wearing masks.
- Removed references to options for Plans A, B, and C.
- Removed reference to remote learning requirement.

Additionally, the following actions were removed that are not supported by current evidence or are no longer needed due to the lower rates of community transmission and increased rates of vaccination including:

- Limit nonessential visitors
- Discontinue activities that bring a large group together, such as field trips or assemblies
- Keep students in small cohorts
- Direct the flow of traffic by designating hallways as one way or designating certain doors for entrance or exit
- Recommend that everyone wear a face covering outdoors
- Keep students' personal items separate
- Conduct daily symptom screening
- Enforce social distancing on transportation
- Provide remote learning options for students unable to be at school due to illness or exposure

#### *Operational Flexibility and Planning for Different Scenarios*

*The Toolkit has been updated to provide school leaders with greater flexibility in implementing the layered prevention strategies based on current COVID-19 trends and updated CDC guidance. School leaders should continue to consult with local public health officials for input on community transmission and vaccine uptake to make local decisions. School leaders should continue to maintain plans for different potential scenarios depending on what restrictions are deemed necessary by state or local public health leaders at any time in the school year to control the spread of the disease. Strategies that SHOULD be implemented by all schools. These are strategies that, if not implemented, create conditions of high risk for COVID-19 exposure and spread. NCDHHS strongly advises that school leaders adopt all the strategies in the SHOULD sections.*

All schools should:

- Require teachers and staff to report vaccination status.
- Require teachers and staff who are unvaccinated, or do not disclose vaccine status, to participate in screening/testing programs.
- Require all children and staff in schools K-12th grade to wear face coverings consistently when indoors. Schools K-12th grade should make mask use universally required (i.e., required regardless of vaccination status) given that most of the student population in those grades are not yet eligible for vaccination.
- Per CDC's Order, require passengers and staff to wear a face covering on buses, vans, and other group school transportation.
- Share guidance and information with teachers, staff, students, and families on the proper use, wearing, removal, and cleaning of cloth face coverings, such as CDC's guidance on wearing and removing cloth face masks and CDC's use of cloth face coverings.
- Provide masks to those students who need them (including on buses), such as students who forgot to bring their mask or whose families are unable to afford them.

The StrongSchools NC Public Health Toolkit states *if a school does not require all individuals to wear a mask, they should ensure a layered mitigation strategy, including physical distancing, ventilation, hand hygiene, adequate access to diagnostic and screening testing and closely monitor for increases in COVID-19 cases.*

All schools should:

- Maintain a minimum of three (3) feet of distance between K-12 students who are not fully vaccinated within school settings to the greatest extent possible without excluding students from full-time, in-person learning.
- Maintain a minimum of six (6) feet between adults (teachers/staff/visitors) and students and between adults (teachers/staff/visitors) who are not fully vaccinated within school settings to the greatest extent possible.

- Follow the recommendations outlined in *Interim Guidance for Administrators and Participants of Youth, College & Amateur Sports Programs*.
- Require teachers and staff to report vaccination status and require those who are unvaccinated, or do not disclose vaccine status, to participate in screening/testing programs.
- Refer individuals to diagnostic testing who have symptoms of COVID-19 or disclose recent known close contact to a person with COVID-19.
- Offer free rapid (antigen) testing on-site at school to facilitate quick COVID-19 diagnosis, inform school staff of what students may be able to stay in school, and inform the need for quarantine of close contacts.
- Incorporate a screening testing strategy consistent with CDC recommendations as in the table below, including required screening testing for unvaccinated teachers and staff.

	<b>Low<sup>1</sup> Transmission Blue</b>	<b>Moderate Transmission Yellow</b>	<b>Substantial Transmission Orange</b>	<b>High Transmission Red</b>
<b>Students</b>	Do not need to screen students.	<b>Offer screening testing for students</b> who are not fully vaccinated at least once per week.		
<b>Teachers and staff</b>	<b>Offer screening testing for teachers and staff</b> who are not fully vaccinated at least once per week.			
<b>High risk sports and activities</b>	<b>Recommend screening testing for high-risk sports and extracurricular activities<sup>2</sup></b> at least once per week for participants who are not fully vaccinated.		<b>Recommend screening testing for high-risk sports and extracurricular activities</b> twice per week for participants who are not fully vaccinated.	<b>Cancel or hold high-risk sports and extracurricular activities virtually</b> to protect in-person learning, unless all participants are fully vaccinated.
<b>Low-and intermediate-risk sports</b>	Do not need to screen students participating in low- and intermediate-risk sports. <sup>2</sup>	<b>Recommend screening testing for low- and intermediate-risk sports</b> at least once per week for participants who are not fully vaccinated.		

Dr. Bryant noted at this time no screening testing is available from the state. A screening vendor does not yet exist.

All schools should:

- Have staff perform self-monitoring of symptoms.
- Have families conduct home-based symptom screening for students, following typical school policies to keep children at home when ill. Recommend that families refer children to diagnostic testing who exhibit symptoms of COVID-19.
- Immediately isolate symptomatic individuals to a designated area at the school.
- Require symptomatic persons to wear a cloth face covering or a procedure mask while waiting to leave the facility or be tested.
- Require school nurses or dedicated school staff who provide direct patient care to wear appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and perform hand hygiene after removing PPE.
- Ensure symptomatic students remain under visual supervision of a staff member who is at least 6 feet away. The supervising adult should wear a cloth face covering or a procedure mask.
- Have a plan for how to transport an ill student or staff member home or to medical care.
- Refer to diagnostic testing individuals who exhibit symptoms of COVID-19 at school or disclose recent known close contact to a person with COVID-19.
- Implement cleaning and disinfecting procedures following CDC guidelines.
- Utilize NCDHHS and the CDC quarantine guidance.
- Enforce that staff and students disclose and stay at home or go home if they are showing COVID-19 symptoms or if they have tested positive for COVID-19.
- Report to local health authorities any suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases among children and staff (as required by NCGS § 130A-136).
- Implement the approved school Contact Tracing Plan.
- Adhere to the following criteria for allowing a student or staff member to return to school. (see chart)

- Provide adequate supplies to support healthy hygiene behaviors (e.g., soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol for safe use by staff and older children, paper towels, and tissues).
- Teach and reinforce handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and/or the safe use of hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol by staff and older children.
- Clean surfaces once a day, prioritizing high-touch surfaces. If there has been a sick person or someone who tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 24 hours, clean and disinfect the space using an EPA approved disinfectant for SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19).
- Ensure that all students ages 5 years and older, and all teachers, staff, and adult visitors wear face coverings when they are on a bus or other transportation vehicle, unless the person (or family member, for a student) states that an exception applies. The federal guidelines requiring face coverings on transportation supersedes state guidelines.
- Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, or other methods.
- Consider ventilation system upgrades or improvements and other steps to increase the delivery of clean air and dilute potential contaminants in the school.

Quarantine is required for an individual who has been a close contact (within 6 feet for at least 15 minutes cumulatively over a 24-hour period) of someone who is determined positive with COVID-19 either through testing or symptom consistent diagnosis, with the following three exceptions:

- Individuals who are fully vaccinated and do not have symptoms do NOT need to quarantine after a close contact. Individuals should get tested 3-5 days after exposure and wear a mask around others until receiving a negative test result.
- People who have tested positive for COVID-19 within the past 3 months and recovered and do not have symptoms do NOT have to quarantine.
- Students who are not fully vaccinated after a close contact in a classroom or other school setting if masks were being worn appropriately and consistently by both the person with COVID-19 and the potentially exposed person do NOT need to quarantine.

What Would Be New for HCPS?

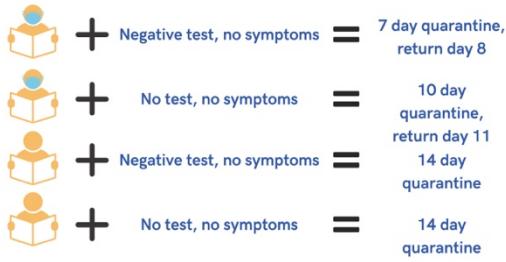
- Require teachers and staff to report vaccination status.
- Require teachers and staff who are unvaccinated, or do not disclose vaccine status, participate in screening/testing programs.
- Incorporate a screening testing strategy consistent with CDC recommendations as in the table below, including required screening testing for unvaccinated teachers and staff.

Dr. Bryant noted the above three items would be new to HCPS if the Board approved to implement them.

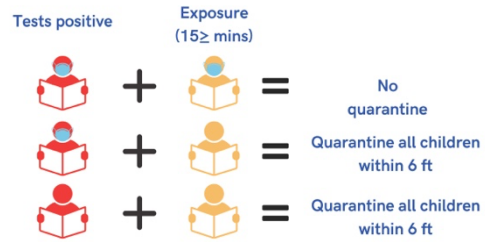
Mrs. Stacey Caskey asked if we were to require staff to disclose their vaccination status would we be able to keep the information private. Dr. Bryant said we would make every effort to do so and to use the information for the purpose intended. Mrs. Amy Lynn Holt asked Steve Smith from the Henderson County Health Department to answer questions. She emailed him her questions prior to the meeting. Mr. Smith asked Ms. Crystal O'Dell, the Director of Nursing at Henderson County Health Department, to join him. Mrs. Holt asked the number of children in Henderson County that have been hospitalized with COVID-19. Ms. O'Dell said there is no way to track this information. She reached out to the Infection Control Preventionists at all the local hospitals and from that information it is zero at this time. Mrs. Holt asked the number of children who have died in Henderson County from COVID-19. Ms. O'Dell said that information is trackable and is zero at this time. Mrs. Holt asked what is the quarantine procedure for public and for HCPS. She is requesting to have a document that is updated weekly and shared with the school nurses in our schools to make sure we are all on the same page across the schools. Ms. O'Dell said the quarantine guidance is now a multi-layered document. There are now options to shorten the quarantine time for unvaccinated as well as no quarantine for a fully vaccinated person. The school nurses have to look at particular conditions surrounding the child to determine the quarantine time for the child. Mrs. Holt asked if quarantine times would be different if a parent's choice to mask or not mask their child. Mr. Smith added the date of exposure is part of the issue with people feeling like quarantine times are conflicting. Ms. O'Dell spoke about each of the images and the quarantine for the exposure. She noted the exposure time is a cumulative 15 minutes of a possible 3-day period. The 3-day period is the 48 hours before onset of symptoms and the day of symptoms. If both children are masked, there is no quarantine. If only the sick person is masked, they are asked

to quarantine. If no one is wearing a mask, they are asked to quarantine. If the child is not wearing a mask, the child cannot do the shortened quarantine period.

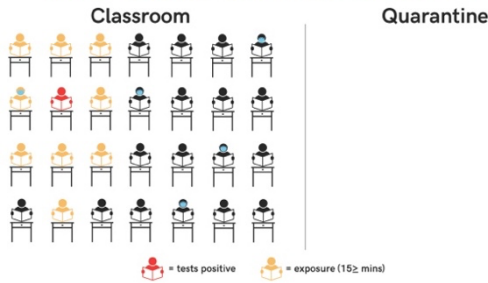
### Shortened Quarantine for Exposures



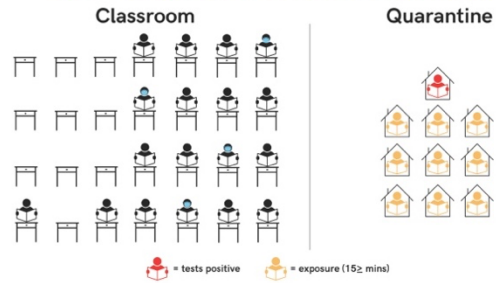
### Quarantine for Exposures



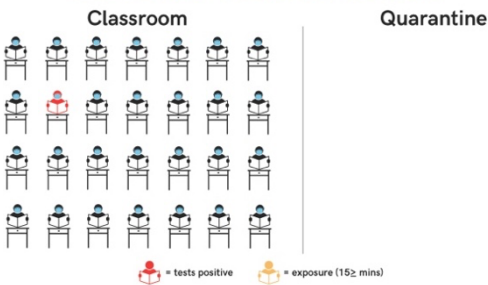
### Elementary Scenario: Masks Optional



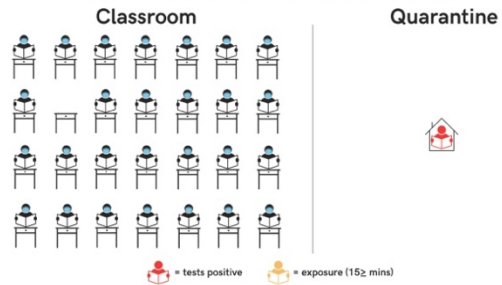
### Elementary Scenario: Masks Optional



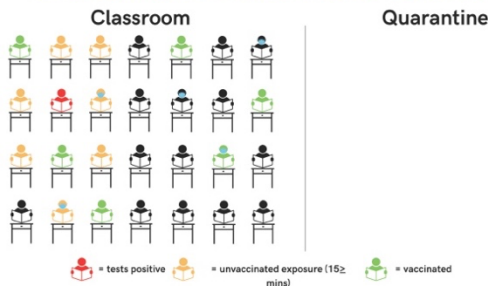
### Elementary Scenario: All Masks



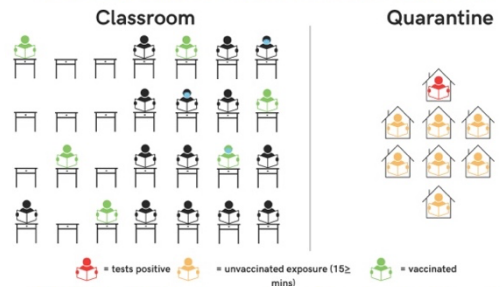
### Elementary Scenario: All Masks



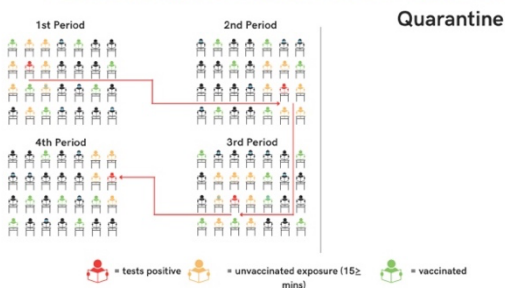
### Middle/High Scenario: Masks Optional



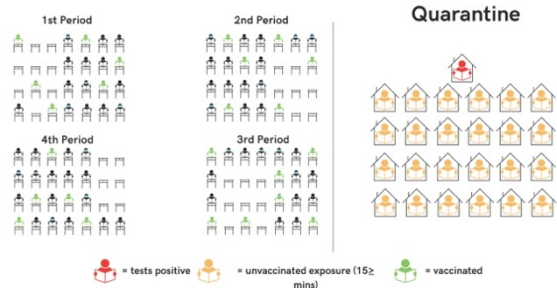
### Middle/High Scenario: Masks Optional



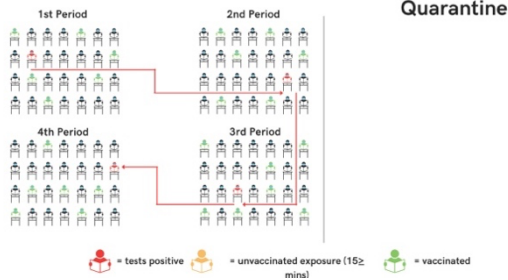
### Middle/High Scenario: Masks Optional



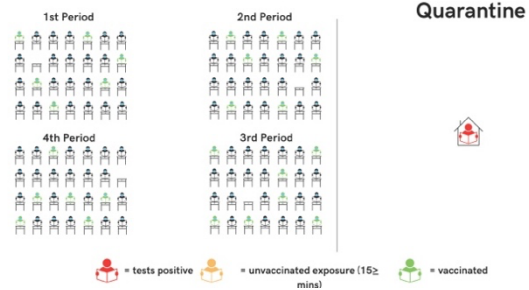
### Middle/High Scenario: Masks Optional



### Middle/High Scenario: Masks Required



### Middle/High Scenario: Masks Required



Ms. O'Dell mentioned in an elementary school scenario with masked and unmasked would be a conservative estimate of a minimum of 24 quarantined students. She noted the two types COVID-19 tests are antigen and diagnostic testing, which is a PCR test. Ms. Dot Case asked what COVID-19 test does the school offer to students. Ms. O'Dell said the school nurses are able to do an antigen test. It helps students to be able to do a shortened quarantine with a negative antigen test and have no symptoms. Right now, the antigen test is not done for a student who is showing symptoms. Mrs. Holt asked if it's possible to see another variant of COVID-19 like what we are seeing with the Delta variant and would it be similar to what we see with the flu each year. Ms. O'Dell said with the flu we see minor deviations. The flu vaccine is adjusted to accommodate for those variations. As long as there is substantial virus spread, there is always a possible of more variants of COVID-19. Mrs. Holt asked if a student under 18 years old is required to have a signed permission slip to receive a vaccination at school. She noted the NC state statute that allows children to consent to getting their own vaccination if the child is over 12 and under 18. Mr. Smith acknowledged the reason for the state statute is not all children having caring parents who will take care of them. Ms. O'Dell noted the state statute does not have an age limit in it. The state statute says the child has to have decisional capacity. The provider has to determine the decisional capacity. The Health Department typically sees 16- and 17-year-old children. The provider is required based on the state statute to give the vaccine if child has decisional capacity. Dr. Bryant noted the vaccines in the situations Ms. O'Dell mentioned is occurring at the Health Department and not on school sites. Mrs. Holt asked if at a school site vaccination clinic this situation would apply. Mr. Smith said it would need to be a conversation between the School Board attorney and the Henderson County attorney to discuss. Mr. Smith said 16- and 17-year-old students do not often seek out vaccinations. Mrs. Holt asked Mr. Campbell if we could limit that case for minor requesting a vaccination on school site or require written permission from a parent to receive the vaccine per Board approval. Mr. Campbell said the Board has the ability to can control what occurs on school property and could require that in certain situations student would need to go to the Health Department. He noted this is not an issue the Board would need to vote on to approve. He would be happy to speak with the Henderson County attorney regarding this concern.

Mr. Craven asked how many nurses we have. Ms. O'Dell noted we have 18 school nurses across our 23 school sites. Mr. Craven asked if there is capacity to increase the number of school nurses to have one in each school. Ms. O'Dell noted a strategy is in place right now with part time nurses. These part time nurses are able to help increase the coverage.

Mr. Jay Egolf asked about the time students will miss from school due to quarantine. He is concerned about the students' education. Dr. Bryant said with quarantines we recognizing the need for additional staffing to help students who are quarantined. The additional staff would be a liaison to contact the student during their quarantine period and to assist the student as he/she transitions back to school from quarantine. We are learning the best ways to support every child depending on the child's situation. Dr. Bryant said we know the most valuable education we can provide is in person learning for every child every day. Ms. O'Dell noted the school nurses take the quarantine guidance seriously. The school nurses look at each child to determine his/her quarantine period to ensure children are not having to quarantine longer than necessary in order to decrease the time missed from in person learning.

Ms. Case asked what funding is need to get four more School Nurses in order for schools to not need to share a School Nurse. Mr. Smith said Henderson County has the highest rate for school nurse to student ratio in the state due to leadership within the school system and the County Commissioners. He mentioned Ms. O'Dell and Ms. Kim Berry has been inventive in ways to decrease the nursing shortages. The strategy is utilizing part time

nurses to back fill the needs when there is a vacancy or a nurse is on leave. Mr. Smith noted the scale of cases if masks are optional that one school nurse per school may not be enough for one school. He mentioned that Blue Ridge Health also assists in some of our schools and that helps with the workload. Ms. Case asked if the County Commissioners decided we have a need for a school nurse at each school would we be able to fill the positions. Mrs. Holt mentioned using ESSER funds to provide four more school nurses during this pandemic. Mr. Smith said that one of the concerns from nurses is the work they are doing with COVID is preventing them from doing what they were prior to the pandemic. Mr. Craven asked about using ESSER funds. Dr. Bryant noted the ESSER funds can be used for anything in response to COVID-19. Mr. Craven asked if masks are made optional could we have four more nurses in school by the school start. Mr. Smith said he doubted by that timeframe they would be able to have four more nurses. They are struggle with finding nurses and the time limited positions would be even harder to fill. Mr. Campbell noted no mention is needed at this time to use ESSER funding to increase school nurses. Ms. Case asked Dr. Frye about who is assisting quarantined students. Dr. Frye said we envision having a position in each school to serve the quarantined students and to assist the students as they transition back after quarantine is over.

Mrs. Caskey asked if it is accurate that the unvaccinated staff is more of a risk to our students than our unvaccinated students are to our adults in the building. Mr. Smith said it is a difficult question to answer. He thinks vaccination is the key. Ms. O'Dell noted that children to be less likely to transmit came before the Delta variant. Unfortunately, that is not what is being seen with the Delta variant.

Mr. Robert Bridges asked Mr. Smith what research is being done about vaccinating children 12 and under. Ms. O'Dell said that she believes the Pfizer clinic trial is still running for ages 5 to 11 and it's possible they may have an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) by December for ages 5 to 11. Mr. Egolf asked if any vaccine is FDA approved at this time. Ms. O'Dell said all COVID-19 vaccines are under EUA and have applied for full FDA approval for ages 18 and up. Dr. Bryant noted that HCPS does not require staff to report vaccination status. Ms. Case asked if it is true that cloth mask is not as good as a surgical mask. Ms. O'Dell said that was based on previous quarantine guidance. The surgical mask does better it protects you and prevents spread. Wearing a cloth face covering helps prevents the spread. She noted that any sort of face covering will shorten the quarantine period.

Mr. Craven asked Dr. Bryant to share what virtual learning would look like if the Board decides to make masks optional. Dr. Bryant noted we currently do not have a remote option for students at this time. If masks are made optional, a remote option may be necessary. The remote option would look different for grades K-8 and 9-12.

#### Virtual Learning Option (K-8)

- Launch online registration for students in grades K through 8
- Hire "new" staff to provide virtual learning, exclusively
- Require families to commit to at least one semester
- Students would be served across the school district
- School day would mirror RLO under Plan C
- May include blended grade levels based on staffing
- Not a hybrid option
- Not available to students under quarantine

The school day would be synchronous condensed instruction from 8 am to 12 pm with additional support in the afternoon. The student schedules would be built to accommodate the courses the student need.

#### Virtual Learning Option (9-12)

- Register through school counselor\* (\*Must have previously demonstrated success in virtual learning)
- Continue to provide online asynchronous courses via
- HCVPS
- NCVPS
- Edmentum
- Require families to commit to a full semester
- Students would be served across the school district
- Not a hybrid option



- Not available to students under quarantine

Mrs. Holt noted she would not want sports or afterschool activities to be available to these students if they choose this model. Dr. Bryant said it would be appropriate to discuss that request under athletic eligibility in agenda item B. Mrs. Caskey noted if the activities are outdoors where there is less risk, then she feels it would be punitive for the students. We keep talking about access and full access. Dr. Bryant said it ultimately for the Board to decide because it would be a change in policy. Ms. Case asked if we have clusters in our schools how we would close schools or classrooms. Dr. Bryant said we will be turning the COVID-19 dashboard back on. He mentioned that a cluster is five COVID-19 cases that are related and not just five cases. HCPS has not had any clusters at this point. Ms. Case asked if masks will still be required on bus transportation. Dr. Bryant deferred to Mr. Campbell regarding the federal guidance. Mr. Campbell said the Toolkit is state requirements and the federal order from January 2021 would mean that masks would be required on bus transportation. Mrs. Caskey noted that if nothing else we have been fluid. She asked if we move to optional masks do we have a number per class or school that we would need to rethink. Dr. Bryant said we do not have a threshold number. He noted that we are in constant conversation with our local health care providers. We know more now than we did before. We would continue to attend to the situation and make recommendations accordingly.

Mrs. Holt asked if we needed to walkthrough each bullet point for what would be new to HCPS under the revised StrongSchools NC Public Health Toolkit. Mr. Campbell said no discussion or motion is required. A motion only needs to be done if a Board member feels it needs to be added.

Ms. Case asked if requiring staff to report vaccination status would be a HIPPA violation. Mr. Campbell said Dr. Bryant is correct that the health information has to be keep in separate file and keep confidential. HIPPA doesn't apply to school system. FERPA is for students and school systems. He noted that most School Boards are not requiring staff to report vaccination status if they are making masks optional.

Mrs. Holt moved that the Henderson County Board of Public Education make masks optional from here on out. Mr. Robert Bridges seconded the motion. Mr. Bridges appreciates the public input and wholeheartedly supports this motion. Mrs. Caskey noted she has an issue with the here on out portion of the motion.

Mrs. Holt amended her motion. Mrs. Holt moved that the Henderson County Board of Public Education make masks optional. Mr. Robert Bridges seconded the motion

Mr. Craven opened the floor for further discussion. Ms. Case said she hopes that whatever is decided that the community will come together. Mrs. Holt noted she is shocked by the bullying that has been going on in our community and the bullying needs to stop. Dr. Revis asked about Hendersonville Elementary School and Bruce Drysdale Elementary School operating under the old Toolkit and if we are seeing more cases than we saw last April. Dr. Bryant said we have not done a comparison. We know that we have cases and quarantines then and now. He would be glad to share more at the August 9 Board meeting regarding where we stand. Mrs. Caskey noted that the Board members have different political and religious views. She said that all seven have agonized over what they decide and trying to do what is best for the children of Henderson County. We need to give grace to each other. Mr. Bridges supports masks optional. He feels that we need to let our children smile and breathe again. Ms. Case asked about quarantine periods with masks and no masks. Ms. O'Dell it requires both parties to have masks to not require a quarantine period. Ms. Case asked if we are giving the Leadership Team the ability to be fluid. Mr. Craven said the Board would have to approval for masks to be mandated again.

Mr. Craven asked masks would be optional if approved. Dr. Bryant noted the preference would be on August 23 in order to give time for the remote option to be in place. Mrs. Holt mentioned that timeline is unacceptable to her. Her 8-year-old at Hendersonville Elementary School is having headaches every day. Dr. Bryant said the intention is to fulfill the Board's direction as soon as possible. Mr. Egolf spoke about while he for choice regarding masks, he wants to make sure we do not go backwards and we can keep our students in school. He said let's make them optional but be sensible.

Mr. Craven noted August 23 will be the date that masks are optional at all school locations. Dr. Bryant added if the Flex schools can be staffed sooner for the remote option, then Flex schools may be able to start sooner.

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, No; Mr. Craven, Yes. (*The motion passed 5-2.*)

Dr. Bryant clarified that the masks optional applies to students, staff, and all visitors to school campuses. Mr. Craven confirmed.

At 11:27 am, Mr. Craven said we will take a 10-minute break. Board meeting resumed at 11:39 am.

B. Approval – Waiver for Board Policy #470: Athletic Participation; Section IX, Athletic Eligibility – (Mr. Scott Rhodes, Assistant Superintendent)

Mr. Blair Craven acknowledged the need to look at the board policy waiver for athletic eligibility was brought up by Mrs. Amy Lynn Holt in the July Board workshop. He noted that last school year the Board waive the athletic eligibility and the NC standards applied for the GPA needed to participate in athletics and extracurricular activities. The NC standards is a 1.0 GPA. The item was added to the agenda because athletic practices started today.

Mrs. Holt said she thinks it imperative to waive it for this semester because the grades from last school year were done virtual. She noted she is thinking specifically about Hendersonville High School. We need to aive one more time. She mentioned for some children it will mean the difference of coming to school and not coming to school.

Mr. Jay Egolf voted against dropping the required GPA last school year. He said he thought we should demand more of our kids. He has heard issues now about internet connection and learning from home issues. As the Board talks a lot about equity and fairness, he has further thought about this request. He mentioned after this vote for the waiver, he will not discuss again to waive the GPA required. He said we need to demand more of our kids and he is done accepting the circumstances.

Mr. Craven's asked is this for the whole or a handful of students. Mr. Scott Rhodes said that unfortunately he does not have that information on how many students it would apply to. It would be fall and winter sports. Mr. Rhodes noted it is difficult to determine the number.

Mrs. Holt asked about the number of students who had to go to summer school. Mr. Rhodes said we could look at that and get the numbers to the Board. He noted that Hendersonville High School is based on the second semester grades just like the three four-block high schools. There is equity in how eligibility it determined across our high schools.

Ms. Dot Case asked why we are talking about it now current athletic eligibility for students. Mrs. Holt said she thought last school year's waiver applied to the fall sports or she would have brought it up last April or May. Mrs. Stacey Caskey said moving forward we want to keep the high standards. She acknowledges the 12 weeks of in person learning at the end of last school year may not have been enough to bring up the GPA. Dr. Revis said the Winter sports start in November and we need the eligibility to be consistent and not change in the middle of the winter sports.

Dr. Bryant presented another option beyond a waiver. He acknowledged the high standards the policy brings for our students. If we recognize we want to transition back in January to the Board policy, then the students would be in a probationary period to be eligible to play that would allow the students to stairstep in order to get back to 2.0 by the end of the first nine weeks. The eligibility to play wouldn't be based on last semester but instead based on the first nine weeks. Mr. Craven thinks this probationary period option is a good compromise for what we are trying to accomplish with keeping standards high and helping students.

Dr. Bryant noted this option would create the data point the Board is looking for regarding waiving the policy. The academic probation would only apply to the students who did not have a 2.0 last semester and would be the only ones on academic probation. The same thing would apply for the tryouts in November for Winter sports. Ms. Case wants to make sure every coach and principal knows. She also wants all teachers to know. Mr. Rhodes said he would communicate to the Athletic Directors as soon as possible. Dr. Bryant noted the information will be included in the all call regarding the masks that will go out to the school community.

Mrs. Amy Lynn Holt made a motion to approve the recommendation of the Superintendent regarding the suspension of the athletic extracurricular policy. Mr. Robert Bridges seconded. (Unanimously approved.)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Mrs. Amy Lynn Holt moved that the meeting be adjourned. Seconded by Mrs. Stacey Caskey. *(Unanimously approved at 11:57am.)*

Minutes approved: August 9, 2021