

HENDERSON COUNTY BOARD OF PUBLIC EDUCATION  
SPECIAL CALLED MEETING  
MINUTES  
September 28, 2020

The Henderson County Board of Public Education met in a special called meeting on Monday, September 28, 2020, beginning at 5:00 pm, at 414 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue West, Hendersonville, NC.

Due to the COVID-19-19 Pandemic, the September 28, 2020 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 capped at no more than 25 persons. The Board received public comment via pre-submitted email sent prior to the meeting. 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; Rick Wood, Vice Chairperson; Michael Absher, Dot Case, Mary Louise Corn, and Jay Egolf.

Board Members Remote: Amy Lynn Holt

Administrative Staff Present: Bo Caldwell, Ed.S. Superintendent; John Bryant, Ed.D., Associate Superintendent, Administrative Services; Jan King, Ed.D., Assistant Superintendent, Curriculum & Instruction; Scott Rhodes, Chief Human Resources Officer; Rick Fender, Chief Technology Officer; Bernie Sochia, Chief Finance Officer.

Attorney Present: Ms. Cynthia Lopez

Board Clerk: Mrs. Kathy R. Johnson

#### CALL TO ORDER

Board Chairman, Mr. Blair Craven called the meeting to order at approximately 5:07 pm. Mr. Blair Craven led all those in attendance in the pledge of allegiance. Mrs. Amy Lynn Holt joined the meeting via phone at 5:09 pm.

#### AGENDA APPROVAL

Mr. Blair Craven acknowledged receipt of the meeting agenda and called for a motion for its approval. Mr. Michael Absher moved that the agenda be approved as presented, seconded by Mrs. Mary Louise Corn. *(Unanimously approved.)*

#### PUBLIC COMMENT

Board members read aloud seven pre-submitted public comments: Mr. Aaron Purcell wants students to go back to school under “Plan A”; Ms. Kailey Hartman feels it’s dangerous for teachers and students to be on ‘Plan B’ with students in the classroom; Mr. Reid Hartman feels that after the positive test cases at his wife’s school, there is not enough PPE to keep everyone safe; Ms. Holly Henson wants her child back in school full-time to encourage his social, educational and psychological growth; Mr. Clay Capps feels we are teaching our children to hate the office of the President of the United States; Ms. Julia Thramann feels it is impossible to socially distance her children in her classroom and feels teachers’ needs are not being taken care of; Ms. Elizabeth Barbour feels it is impossible to socially distance students under ‘Plan A’ and wants to continue to teach under ‘Plan B.’

#### OLD BUSINESS

None

#### NEW BUSINESS

##### A. RETURN TO LEARN DISCUSSION, PLAN A – *(Superintendent Bo Caldwell and the Leadership Team)*

Governor Roy Cooper presented three ‘Plans’ on how students may return to school after the initial statewide school closures in March of 2020, closures that were triggered by the COVID19 pandemic. Henderson County Public Schools moved from ‘Plan C,’ a fully remote form of instruction that was initiated by Governor Roy Cooper’s Executive Order No. 117, on March 14, 2020, to ‘Plan B,’ a hybrid model of remote and face to face instruction, beginning September 21, 2020. Staggered start dates allowed students participating in ‘Plan B’ to return to campus, based on the following grade level groupings.

September 21: all PreK-Grade 2 and eligible Intensive Intervention students start on-campus  
September 24: rotation of Grade 3-5 students in Groups A/B  
September 28: rotation of Grade 6-12 students in Groups A/B

On September, 17, 2020, Governor Roy Cooper announced that 'Plan A,' the full return to in-person learning for elementary students for grades PreK-5, would now be an option for students effective no earlier than October 5, 2020. Board Chair, Mr. Blair Craven asked for a Special Called meeting of the School Board to discuss the option of moving from 'Plan B' to 'Plan A.' Mr. Craven asked Mr. Caldwell to present his ideas regarding the move to 'Plan A.'

Superintendent Bo Caldwell shared the local health pandemic indicator numbers from the Harvard Global Health Institute. Research from the Harvard Global Health Institute (HGHI) Data indicates risk levels that are calculated based on daily cases per 100,000 populations with a seven day rolling average. As of Monday, September 28, the average daily number of COVID cases in Henderson County was 13.5/100,000 people. This represents an increased average of 6.7 cases, up from the September 8, 2020 board meeting where the percentage was 6.8/100,000 people. Mr. Caldwell reminded those in attendance that Health Department Director, Mr. Steve Smith, was comfortable with our Return to Learn numbers being around 7-10.

The leadership team reminded those in attendance of the 'Plan B' Rules from our State officials.

- Remote learning option for all students
- Face coverings for all students, staff, and visitors at any HCPS facility
- Social distancing requirements whenever possible
- Prescribed cleaning and disinfecting recommendations
- Limit non-essential visitors and activities involving outside groups and organizations
- Discontinue activities that involve bringing together large groups of people
- (Assemblies, performances, field trips, etc.)
- School bus capacity restrictions
- Daily symptom screening for all students and staff, including temperature screening

Dr. King shared that the current enrollment of students in Henderson County Public Schools on 'Plan B' can be broken down into these categories:

A-Day Attendees	28%	
B-Day Attendees	29%	
Everyday Attendees	19%	
Fully Remote Attendees	24%	(these percentages are out of 13, 352 students enrolled)

Dr. King stated that the percentage of K-2 fully remote learners has increased from 17% to 26% since K-2 students returned to school on September 21, 2020. Mr. Caldwell reminded the board that today was the first day for middle and high school students in group A to return to school. Dr. King said that our enrollment has been extremely fluid with some students moving to remote learning. She believes this will continue as Covid numbers fluctuate. Dr. King encouraged parents to 'officially' enroll their child in 'remote learning only' by going to the HCPS website because these students will still be required to come to school to take assessments and state tests.

COVID positive test results reported while on 'Plan B' - after 1 week of school:

- 3 positive COVID19 test results for K2 students who have attended face-to-face instruction
- 37 students quarantined for 14 days based on close contact tracing by HCDPH
- 2 staff members and one school nurse quarantined for 14 days based on close contact tracing by HCDPH

Ms. Case asked if we could hire additional nurses to assist our teachers and administrators on our campuses? Mr. Craven said that could be a budget issue to discuss with the County Commissioners. Dr. Bryant replied that all of our schools currently have nursing services available. Dr. Bryant stated the County Commissioners had met the

nurse/student ratio request that we presented to them during our budget sessions prior to the pandemic. The current recommended ratio is one nurse per 750 students. Ms. Case added that we need to have a dedicated nurse at each school so the nurses won't have to split their time.

With the announcement from Governor Roy Cooper that 'Plan A' is now an option for all PreK-5<sup>th</sup> grade students (effective no earlier than October 5, 2020) Superintendent Caldwell shared the Rules for 'Plan A' from our State Officials:

- Remote learning option for all students
- Face coverings for all students, staff, and visitors at any HCPS facility
- **Minimal** social distancing requirements
- Prescribed cleaning and disinfecting recommendations
- Limit non-essential visitors and activities involving outside groups and organizations
- Discontinue activities that involve bringing together large groups of people (Assemblies, performances, field trips, etc.)
- School bus capacity restrictions **strongly recommended ('Plan B')**
- Daily symptom screening for all students and staff, including temperature screening

Mr. Caldwell emphasized that 'Plan A' removes the ability for proper social distancing in the classroom and on our buses. Mr. Caldwell stated that the strong recommendation from the governor's office to keep transportation on 'Plan B' while moving to 'Plan A' isn't feasible. He stated that our bus numbers are good on 'Plan B' but additional students would mean reduced space between students on our buses.

Dr. Jan King stated that class size information should to be taken into consideration with any decision reached by the Board. Below is the current elementary class size information, as of September 28, 2020.

	<u>K</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
Minimum	14	14	15	15	22	22
Maximum	20	20	21	20	29	29
Average	17	17	17	18	23	25

Dr. King stated that if the board chooses 'Plan A', our teachers would require time to adjust their lesson plans and make the transitions needed to reset their classrooms both physically and virtually. Dr. King added that we would need time to communicate properly with parents and allow them the opportunity to consider the logistics of moving to 'Plan A.' Parents would need to decide if they wanted their child to continue on the new plan. Mr. Caldwell stated that he might be comfortable transitioning Grade 3 students back to class within our 'Plan B,' however the large class sizes in grades 4 and 5 concern him. Mr. Caldwell feels that grades 4 and 5 could not properly social distance due to the large class sizes, even if we remove the remote learner numbers.

Dr. John Bryant presented information on the transportation recommendations for 'Plan A.' State officials stated that, *If schools operate under 'Plan A', they are strongly encouraged to operate school transportation under 'Plan B' health and safety requirements.* 'Plan B' ensures density reduction on school transportation to allow for additional social distancing. Dr. Bryant shared the requirements for school transportation under 'Plan B' are: 1) No more than one passenger can be seated per school bus seat (considerations for family members to share one seat). 2) No more than two passengers can be seated in a contracted vehicle. Dr. Bryant stated that these health and safety recommendations cannot be met in 'Plan A.' He added, additional students in the classroom would reduce social distancing from the recommended 6 feet to around 2-3 feet and students would be even closer on the buses. Dr. Bryant stated that the addition of multiple bus routes would be required for all elementary schools to keep the 'Plan B' distancing recommendations in place.

Superintendent Bo Caldwell asked elementary school principals to obtain feedback from their teachers regarding a possible move to 'Plan A.' Mr. Caldwell shared the following responses,

- "Recognize the importance and value of face to face instruction"
- "Some comfort and some concern"
- "Mixed bag"
- "Need time to work through current 'Plan B'"
- "Concerns about changing too quickly"
- "Need time to prepare for virtual learners"
- "Concerns about class size numbers"
- "Some want all kids back as soon as possible"
- "Some have real reservations about reducing safety expectations"
- "Need flexibility to group remote learners"

Mr. Caldwell summarized that teachers believe they need more time implementing 'Plan B' before they transition to 'Plan A,' teachers are concerned about the ability for social distancing under 'Plan A,' they have concerns about transitioning too quickly and the combination of in person and virtual instruction presented simultaneously has been extremely difficult for our teachers. Ms. Case said that teachers feel they aren't being heard when they voice their safety concerns. She suggested a survey be sent to all teachers and staff to gauge what they feel is working in 'Plan B,' what isn't working in 'Plan B,' and what they fear about moving to 'Plan A.' Dr. King stated that as with all other plans, 'Plan A' would be fluid. Henderson County Schools will continue to offer a fully remote learning option for parents and students who are not ready to return to face to face instruction.

Mr. Absher stated that teachers have contacted him about the lack of PPE for their classroom. Dr. Bryant assured that masks have been distributed to all schools for all staff and students. Mr. Wood asked if N95 masks could be provided to our teachers? Dr. Bryant replied, those masks are not being sourced to the educational environment but are being reserved for workers in the medical field.

Superintendent Bo Caldwell stated the following steps have been implemented in HCPS Return to Learn, 'Plan B' since the previous board meeting:

- September 21 - All PreK - 2nd Grade students every day Eligible Intensive Intervention students every day
- September 24 - Rotation of students in Grades 3 - 5 [A/B]
- September 28 - Rotation of students in Grades 6 - 12 [A/B] (*Began the day of this meeting*)

Mr. Caldwell stated the next step will be up to the Board of Education. Mr. Caldwell's recommendation is to remain on 'Plan B' due to the current uptick in Covid cases in Henderson County and due to the lack of social distancing that would be associated with a move to 'Plan A.' Mr. Caldwell believes our teachers need a chance to fully implement 'Plan B' and see what issues may arise before moving to a new model. Mr. Caldwell and Dr. King want to explore opportunities for improving the virtual instruction component of 'Plan B.' Dr. King would like to find a way to alleviate some of the workload from teachers who are providing both face to face and virtual instruction simultaneously each day. Mr. Caldwell said he might be comfortable adding Grade 3 to our current 'Plan B' and will talk with elementary principals for their input. Mr. Caldwell will investigate the Grade 3 class size numbers and provide an update at the October 13, 2020 regularly scheduled school board meeting. Once again, Mr. Caldwell emphasized that implementing 'Plan A' would eliminate social distancing within classroom environments and on school buses for elementary school students.

Mrs. Holt said she ran the numbers on what it would take to hire a fully virtual teacher for every classroom and it isn't feasible since we would need approximately 57 teachers. She acknowledged that number was much higher than she had expected and stated that is not an option due to budget and hiring constraints.

Board Chair, Mr. Blair Craven stated that his reason for calling the meeting were to consider the following options, 1) Go to 'Plan A,' 2) Stay on 'Plan B,' 3) Go back to 'Plan C.' Mr. Craven opened the floor for board discussion.

Mr. Craven agreed with the Leadership Team that we do not need to move to 'Plan A' at this time. He feels we need to find a way to lighten our teachers' workload. Mr. Craven also thinks we need to look at our virtual learning plan and find a way to make it better for staff and students. Mr. Craven and Mr. Egolf feel we need to look at long term planning for a totally virtual learning model.

Ms. Case stated that she is totally against moving to Plan A.

Mr. Egolf stated that we need consistency and he doesn't want us to unnecessarily move kids back and forth between plans. He believes our teachers are overloaded right now and he wants to find a solution to help them. He also asked if it would be better for the K-2 teachers if they were to move to Plan A?

Mrs. Holt said the fluctuation between plans is going to happen simply because of the world we are in now. She said when the Governor made his announcement about moving to Plan A on October 5, she was all in favor! Now she feels we need to stay on 'Plan B' for a while. She wants to get input from teachers on where they are now because there isn't a 'one size fits all' solution. She stated that our teachers are doing a wonderful job but we need to find a way to make the virtual component better for teachers and students. She believes we must move in phases to finally get to Plan A.

Mr. Absher asked what constituted a 'cluster' of cases? Dr. Bryant said the Health Department defines that as 5 or more cases at a specific location/site at an individual time or over a 12-hour period. Dr. Bryant added that if a cluster is identified, he will send a district-wide message to all HCPS parents.

Mr. Wood asked at what point will School Board members be notified of Covid cases identified within the schools? Dr. Bryant replied that we can notify board members with every notification from the Health Department, if they so desired. Mr. Caldwell said we will share that information with the Board.

Ms. Case asked how many cases it would take to close a school? Dr. Bryant stated that is an ongoing conversation with the Health Department. Mr. Caldwell stated the two main factors in closing a school would be the number of cases within the school and the lack of staff available to provide a safe environment for the students. He added that Mr. Smith from the Health Department would make the call to shut down a school.

Mr. Craven revisited the idea of sending out a teacher survey to gain their input but acknowledged each grade level's data would be specific to their current situations. Mr. Craven feels the data could be beneficial for future planning. Mr. Caldwell asked that his team be allowed to designate the best tool to obtain viable feedback from all teachers. Feedback will be shared with the Board of Education.

Mrs. Corn stated that she is in support of moving slowly between plans, transitioning Grade 3 to everyday attendance on 'Plan B,' and she encouraged the Leadership Team to have real conversations with teachers when obtaining their input. Mrs. Corn left the meeting at 6:33pm due to a prior commitment.

Mr. Craven stated that it appears the board is in agreement that we should remain on 'Plan B' for now and we should continue to monitor the Covid numbers in Henderson County over the next couple of weeks in association with any board decisions. Mr. Craven asked Superintendent Caldwell to look at the option of transitioning Grade 3 students back into the classroom for every day instruction and he feels the Board should give the Leadership Team time to review the virtual learning plan and offer suggestions on how we can best support our teachers and students.

Mr. Craven asked for affirmation from Board members regarding these statements. All Board members voiced their agreement with his statements.

Mr. Craven stated that a vote was not needed at this time to continue on 'Plan B' and that Superintendent Caldwell has the flexibility within 'Plan B' to implement changes as he deems appropriate.

At approximately 6:41pm, Mr. Craven called for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Michael Absher made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Ms. Dot Case. The motion was approved.

Minutes approved: October 13, 2020