

Special Called Board Meeting Highlights July 22, 2020

The Gates County Board of Education met in a special called session on Wednesday, July 22, 2020, at the Gates County Courthouse, 202 Court Street, Gatesville, NC. Chairman Ray Felton called the meeting to order at 9:06 a.m. The following board members were present: Mr. Ray Felton, Mrs. Glendale Boone, Mr. Leslie Byrum, Mrs. Sallie Ryan, and Mrs. Amanda Pacitto.

Mr. Leslie Byrum made a motion to approve the agenda. Mrs. Amanda Pacitto seconded the motion. Chairman Felton called for a vote. Board members stated their name and their vote, and the motion carried unanimously.

There was a moment of silence, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

There was no Unfinished Business.

Dr. Barry Williams, Superintendent, presented the following:

On March 14, 2020, Governor Roy Cooper closed all schools in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, Gates County Schools changed to remote instruction for all students.

On July 14, 2020, Governor Cooper directed that all North Carolina Public Schools would reopen for the 2020-2021 school year under Plan B with an optional Remote Instruction Only plan for families who do not wish to participate in face-to-face instruction.

Plan B

Gates County Schools' administration and staff have worked diligently to establish our instructional, health, and safety plan for the reopening of school in August.

The plan you have been provided meets the requirements for reopening schools as directed by Governor Cooper with the collaboration of the NC Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS), the NC State Board of Education (NCSBE) and the NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI).

The main goal of Gates County Schools is to provide the safest and healthiest environment for our students and staff. Key components of the reopening plan include:

- Limiting the number of people inside school buildings to meet 6 feet social distancing requirements
- Cloth face coverings required for all students from Kindergarten through 12th Grade in school and on buses, and for all teachers, school staff, and adult visitors
- Established protocols for cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting, to ensure the safest learning environment for students and staff

In regard to instruction, the proposed reopening plan includes:

- A blended instructional plan offering students both face-to-face instruction and remote learning
- A remote instruction only option for parents choosing to not send their children to school
- Students participating in blended instruction will be divided into Group A and Group B. Group A students will attend school on Monday and Tuesday, Group B students will attend school on Thursday and Friday. Students in Group A will be on remote learning Thursday and Friday. Students in Group B will be on remote learning Monday and Tuesday
- Wednesdays will be used as a teacher planning and professional development day and will provide the opportunity for staff members to work with small groups, work in remediation with students, etc. Wednesdays will also be used as a "deep" cleaning day
- Siblings will be placed in the same group to assist families and transportation
- New instruction will be taught in the classroom and through online platforms such as Google Classroom, Canvas, and Zoom
- Our students with special needs who are served in self-contained classrooms may attend school four days a week with parental consent
- Transportation of children to and from school will be provided by school bus. Parents may opt to transport their child by personal vehicle.
- We will all be in constant vigilance to monitor our students and staff and to communicate immediately with the Gates County Health Department and our stakeholders about issues and COVID-19 cases.
- The reopening of school would occur on August 17, 2020.

OR

We also have been given the flexibility to open schools under Plan C, Remote Instruction Only, if we as a school district feel it is in the best interest of our students and staff.

PLAN C

- Remote Instruction for all students. All instruction is provided online and with supplemental packets. The Remote Instruction Only plan, which is incorporated in Plan B, is outlined in great detail on pages 6 through 28.
- During the spring of 2020, we were immediately thrown into a remote instructional environment. As we worked through the 2nd semester, we were able to evaluate, assess, and make recommendations for improved to remote learning.

- We are increasing our technology and our internet connectivity to provide equitable access to online learning. Being a rural school district, we do have online access issues, but we are working to alleviate those issues with devices for students who need them and internet access at home for those who do not currently have it.
- We all recognize that face-to-face learning is the best educational option for our students and staff. However, with the current status of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Remote Instruction Only plan, Plan C, will ensure the safety, health and well-being of our students and staff.
- If Plan C is used to begin the school year, we could continually monitor the status of the pandemic and transition to Plan B as the pandemic subsides.

Mrs. Sallie Ryan noted that she would like to see some face-to-face instruction for our special needs students. Mrs. Chante' Jordan, Director of Exceptional Children, stated that this is possible, even with Plan C- remote learning. Mrs. Ryan asked the principals about the survey they had conducted with their parents. The principals reported the following:

- Mrs. Gail Hawkins, Buckland Elementary
48.7% Face to Face
39.7% Remote Only
11.5% Other
- Mrs. Amber Buxton, T.S. Cooper Elementary
50% Face to Face
38% Remote Only
13% Other
- Dr. Shawn Wilson, Gatesville Elementary
40% Face to Face
47% Remote
13% Other
- Mrs. Kelly Eure, Central Middle
44.5% Face to Face
45.2% Remote
10.3% Other
- Mr. Jonathan Hayes, Gates County High
44% Face to Face
55% Remote

Mrs. Tammy Boone, Assistant Superintendent, would like to see face-to-face instruction for some of our students. Mr. John Smith, Director of Technology, noted that we have

approximately 115 Hot Spots that will work with multiple carriers, to be distributed to students without internet access. We are hoping to purchase as many as 400 Chrome Books for students.

Comments from Board Members:

Mr. Leslie Byrum

- Suggested remote learning for the first nine weeks of the 2020-2021 school year
- Adopt and monitor a plan
- Not enough buses to transport students with the safety mandates
- Doesn't think the two days face-to-face learning is any more beneficial
- Some teachers feel if we do face-to-face instruction, they are being forced into early retirement due to health concerns

Mr. Ray Felton

- Agree with Mr. Byrum
- It will not be easy to replace teachers, especially in the math field
- Just not worth the health risk to our students, teachers and the community as a whole
- Safety has to be our main focus

Mrs. Glendale Boone

- Agree with Mr. Byrum and Mr. Felton
- Would love for our students to come back to school for face-to-face instruction, but not willing to jeopardize lives to accomplish this
- Agree we should do remote learning for the first nine weeks

Mrs. Amanda Pacitto

- Agree with the other board members, that delaying the face-to-face instruction for nine weeks is better safe than sorry
- We can reevaluate after that
- Speaking as a parent, I am not willing to send my children back into the schools

Mrs. Sallie Ryan

- Agree with going with Plan C, – remote learning - due to safety concerns
- Would like the option for our special needs students to have some face-to-face instruction
- Remote instruction also has problems, especially child care for our working parents

Audience attendee Jennifer Logan also expressed concerns about students being able to receive face-to-face instruction when needed, if remote learning is chosen.

Audience attendee Cindy Barber expressed her agreement that our special needs student population may need extra provisions, if we go with remote learning, but also thinks we should look at other groups of students, such as our AIG students, to keep them from falling behind.

Mr. Leslie Byrum noted that a good portion of the school districts in North Carolina have better internet access than Gates County. We are working to improve this. He feels that we have to put safety first for our entire community. He asked that parents please reach out to teachers when they feel their child needs individual instruction. Our teachers do a great job, and our students do very well. He asked Dr. Williams if we had received the masks promised by the governor, and Dr. Williams said we have not.

Mrs. Chante' Jordan noted that approximately 2% of our special needs students cannot function with remote learning, due to their disabilities. They have to have someone to physically be with them. This is approximately 8 to 12 students. Arrangements can be made to meet the needs of these students. Most of the EC student population can do remote learning.

Mrs. Sallie Ryan made a motion to approve Plan C for the first nine weeks of the 2020-2021 school year, with the exception of special needs students that cannot benefit from remote learning. Mr. Leslie Byrum seconded the motion. Chairman Felton called for a vote. Board members stated their name and their vote, and the motion carried unanimously.

The Board noted they will review this at the September 14th regular session, to decide the course of action beyond the first nine weeks.

Dr. Shawn Wilson, Principal at Gatesville Elementary, asked if this included Pre-K and the answer was yes.

Mrs. Glendale Boone made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Leslie Byrum seconded the motion. Chairman Felton called for a vote. Board members stated their name and their vote, and the motion passed unanimously.

There being no further business, Chairman Felton adjourned the meeting at 10:03 a.m.