

BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL CALLED MEETING
10:00 a.m. – Call to Order – Minitorium
August 5, 2021
OPEN SESSION
Broadcast Live on YouTube

MINUTES

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Buncombe County Board of Education met in a special called session on August 5, 2021 at 10:00 a.m. in the Minitorium located at 175 Bingham Road, Asheville, North Carolina and via electronically on Zoom for Board members and streamed live on YouTube, when the following business was transacted.

The following Board members were present:

Ann Franklin, Madam Chair	Pat Bryant, Member
Peggy Buchanan, Member	Amanda Simpkins, Member
Cindy McMahon, Vice-Chair (virtual attendance)	Max Queen, Member (virtual attendance)
Amy Churchill, Member	

Staff present: Dr. Tony Baldwin, Superintendent; Susanne Swanger, Associate Superintendent; Joseph Hough, Assistant Superintendent; Barry Pace, Director of Technology; Robert Frisby, Assistant Director of Technology; Stacia Harris, Director of Communications; Leslie Averill, Scott Emory and Josh Ponder, Technology Support Specialists; Dean Shatley, Attorney and Kim Matthews, Executive Administrative Assistant

CALL TO ORDER – Madam Chair Franklin called the meeting to order and noted that Mr. Queen, Ms. McMahon and Ellis Vaughan, Buncombe County Health and Human Services Clinical Services Coordinator would be joining the meeting via Zoom.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mr. Bryant made a motion to approve the agenda and Ms. Buchanan seconded the motion – the motion passed unanimously by a roll call vote.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

MOMENT OF SILENCE

ACTION AGENDA

- Consideration of Buncombe County Schools' "Return to Learn" Plans

Dr. Baldwin began by stating that the good news for the 2021-2022 school year is that all our buildings will be open for in-person learning. BCS will have the Virtual Academy option available for students as well. He also stated that our summer school was very successful but acknowledged that there will be challenges ahead to help our students recover from the past year and a half.

Dr. Baldwin presented the Board with information for their consideration to help determine plans for students returning to school in a few weeks. Data from NCDHHS' County Alert System color coded map was shared. He noted that the time-span of the map was from July 4-17. This map shows a moderate impact for those dates but expects that Buncombe County will move to a higher level of concern when the new map is released. The data from the CDC's map is current, but that it spans a one-week period and doesn't take into consideration the impact on the local hospital system. Next, Dr. Baldwin gave the Board the latest information on Covid cases, positivity rates, and ICU hospitalizations for both the county and state level. He also shared the comparison between the county and state vaccination numbers. Dr. Baldwin also highlighted the July 29th revisions from the StrongSchoolsNC Toolkit. After this, Dr. Baldwin presented the Board with two options for consideration on returning students to the school buildings. Advantages and disadvantages to each option were also discussed.

Option A: Face coverings will be optional while inside the school building for students in Kindergarten through Grade 13 as well as all staff. Supporting layers of mitigation practice within areas such as physical distancing, hand washing, cleaning and ventilation will be prioritized. Face coverings will be required for all individuals-students and staff, while inside a school transportation bus or vehicle. The Board reserves the right to issue a face covering mandate, in the event, that such a requirement becomes necessary in order to maintain in-person learning as a result of accelerating local Covid-19 case rates. This mandate may be specified for individual school, individual districts, or the entire system. As a recommendation to accompany the Option A choice, district leadership recommends that the Board's initial decision to operate schools for the 2021-2022 school year be reviewed, at a minimum, during each monthly board session in accordance with local Covid-19 data patterns and metrics. As a benchmark only, and subject to consideration of all relevant factors, the Board would consider a change in plans if the following Buncombe County metrics were met representing an increased risk of Covid-10 spread: Positivity rate equals or exceeds the state average and/or coded as either orange or red on the county alert map.

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Option B: Face coverings will be required while inside the school building for students and staff in Kindergarten through Grade 13. Both students and staff may voluntarily provide proof of vaccination in order to be exempted from face covering requirements while inside the school building. Likewise, an exemption is available for individuals due to a medical or behavioral condition or disability impacted by face covering usage.

Dr. Baldwin emphasized that there would be no tolerance for bullying, harassment, or discrimination relative to an individual's wearing or not wearing a face covering.

Ms. McMahon left the meeting at 11:00 a.m.

The Board members then spent considerable time directing questions to Ellis Vaughan from BCHHS. She answered questions concerning positivity rates for younger age groups, quarantining practices with masks wearing, physical distancing, outdoor guidelines, hospitalizations and death rates, and children's physical responses to Covid. After further discussion a motion was made.

Ms. Franklin made a motion to accept the recommendation of Option A and Ms. Simpkins seconded the motion.

Ms. Franklin then explained her position on this recommendation. Other Board members then explained their position and why they would or would not support the motion.

Ms. Franklin called the vote by a roll call. The motion failed to pass with a vote of 2:4. With Ms. Franklin and Ms. Simpkins voting "yes" and Ms. Churchill, Mr. Queen, Mr. Bryant, and Ms. Buchanan voting "no".

Mr. Bryant stated that since Option A had been considered, he felt that the Board should consider Option B as well, although he does not support this recommendation because of the difficulties in middle schools and high schools when students are changing classes in the hallways.

Mr. Bryant then made a motion to accept the Option B recommendation as presented and include the development of criteria by administration similar to that in Option A to guide decisions and Ms. Churchill seconded the motion. The Board then discussed the motion on the floor and how and what specific criteria should be developed to guide this option. Members also expressed criteria guidelines that they would feel comfortable with.

Mr. Bryant made a motion to amend his motion by include wording that staff and the Board develop criteria on when to make masks optional and when to make mask mandatory and Mr. Queen seconded the motion. The Board then discussed the development of criteria by the administration and the Board's approval of such when it would be presented.

The vote was called on Mr. Bryant's amendment to his original motion. The amendment to the motion was approved unanimously by a roll call vote of 6/0.

Ms. Churchill then made a motion to amend Mr. Bryant's original motion that masks be required of all staff and students in grades K-8, regardless of vaccination status, and that in grades 9-13 the recommendation in Option B would remain the same that these students and staff could voluntarily provide proof of vaccination in order to be exempt from wearing a face covering while inside the building. Hearing no second, the motion failed.

The vote was called on Mr. Bryant's original motion to approve Option B as amended for face mask guidance in schools. The motion passed by a roll call vote of 4/2, with Ms. Simpkins, Ms. Buchanan, Ms. Franklin, and Mr. Queen voting "yes" and Mr. Bryant and Ms. Churchill voting "no".

Ms. Simpkins made a motion that masks would not be required when students are involved in extraneously physical activity associated with indoor athletics in our middle and high schools and Ms. Franklin seconded the motion.

Ms. Simpkins explained her position on the matter. Dr. Baldwin explained what guidelines were put in place by the NCHSAA. Other Board members asked questions of Dr. Baldwin. Mr. Bryant asked if this item could be tabled until this evening's regular meeting in order to have further time to consider this issue. Ms. Simpkins agreed and asked that it be placed on the action agenda for that evening. The Board agreed by consensus to do so.

ADJOURNMENT – Madam Chair Franklin

Mr. Bryant made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:43 a.m. and Ms. Buchanan seconded the motion – the motion was approved unanimously by a roll call vote of 6/0. (Ms. McMahon had left the meeting at this point)

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

- The Board of Education Regular Meeting will begin at 5:30 p.m. this evening.

Tony Baldwin, Superintendent &
Ex Officio Secretary

Ann B. Franklin, Madam Chair

Minutes for Approval: September 2, 2021
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