

BOARDROOM CHATTER

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BOARD OF EDUCATION

Mrs. Crystal Bender, President
Mr. Robert Farrell, Vice President
Mrs. Debra Frank
Mrs. Tammy Fraley
Dr. David Bohn
Mr. Jeff Blank, Superintendent
Ms. Brooklyne Noel, SMOB

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Election of Officers

Mrs. Crystal Bender and Mr. Bob Farrell were re-elected as the school board president and vice president, respectively, for another term.

Recognize Tara Fazenbaker

Mr. Blank took a moment to publicly recognize and thank Mrs. Tara Fazenbaker, who retired as the principal of George's Creek Elementary School at the end of December. Tara worked for many years in ACPS as an instructional assistant, a teacher at several schools, an assistant principal, and finally a principal. She earned both her Bachelor and Master's degrees from Frostburg State University.

CDC Update from the Health Department

Ms. Jenelle Mayer, Health Officer for the Allegany County Health Department, provided the school board with an update on COVID-19 statistics and new guidance from the CDC. Currently, the case rate in Allegany County is 257.65 per 100,000 population compared to 199.06 in Maryland. The positivity rate in Allegany County is 29.11% compared to 26.62 in Maryland. The vaccination rate in Allegany County is 49.3% compared to 71% in Maryland. 36.4% of youth ages 12-17 are fully vaccinated in Allegany County, and 41.2% have received at least one dose of vaccine. In Maryland in this same age group, 69.1% are fully vaccinated, and 78.8% have received at least one dose of vaccine. Finally, 763 children ages 5-11 in Allegany County have received at least one dose of vaccine.

The school board voted to begin implementing new isolation and quarantine guidelines recommended by the CDC and MDH. Individuals positive for COVID-19 may return to school after 5 full days of isolation and improved symptoms. Any person positive for COVID-19 who has completed 5 full days of isolation and has improved symptoms by January 19th may return to school on that date. Improved symptoms include no fever for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication, no vomiting or diarrhea for 24 hours, and no active cough. Those returning after 5 days must wear a well-fitting mask that, during the next 5 days, can be removed only to eat. Those students participating in sports, band, or other activities where their mask must be removed will be unable to participate in those activities for an additional 5 days. Individuals who still have symptoms will continue to isolate until symptoms have improved.

Fully vaccinated individuals or individuals positive for COVID-19 in the past 90 days who are a close contact to a positive person will not be required to quarantine as long as they do not have symptoms. Those age 18 and over who are eligible for a vaccination booster must have received that booster in order to be considered fully vaccinated.

Unvaccinated or not fully vaccinated individuals who are a close contact to a positive person may return to school if they have completed 5 full days of quarantine since their last exposure to the positive person and have no symptoms. Any person quarantined due to being a close contact who has completed 5 full days of quarantine by January 19th may return to school on that date. Those returning after 5 days must wear a well-fitting mask that, during the next 5 days, can be removed only to eat. Those students participating in sports, band, or other activities where their mask must be removed will be unable to participate in those activities for an additional 5 days.

It is recommended that individuals who are a close contact to a positive person and who have not had COVID-19 in the past 90 days obtain a COVID-19 test 5 days after their last exposure to a positive person regardless of their vaccination status.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Approve minutes for meetings held on December 7, 2021.
2. Approve routine personnel actions for the period of December 1-31, 2021.
3. Receive school construction/maintenance report for the period of December 1-31, 2021.
4. Receive monthly IT report
5. Receive monthly financial report

Screening Process Update

Mr. Steve Wilson, ACPS Supervisor of HR, provided the school board with an update on the screening process for vaccination information. At the December 2021 school board meeting, Mr. Wilson briefed the board on the school system's plan to comply with the Emergency Testing Standard (ETS) that, at that time, was under legal scrutiny in the U.S. Court of Appeals in the 6th Circuit.

This appeal has since been dissolved, and the ETS is currently being reviewed by the U.S. Supreme Court to make a decision regarding the future of the ETS.

In the meantime, as this process unfolds, employers are still required to work towards the "Get Vaccinated or Get Tested" requirement to protect unvaccinated employees.

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This requirement was originally to go into effect on January 10, 2022, but the stay, which took several weeks to dissolve, has pushed back the date for compliance until February 9, 2022. Employers are required to show progress towards having a policy and testing program for unvaccinated employees to avoid fines associated with non-compliance.

ACPS has completed surveys of permanent and non-permanent employees to determine their vaccination status. The school system is now working with Capitol Diagnostics, a testing company approved by MSDE, to create a schedule for testing employees who are not vaccinated. The hope is to have this testing program implemented in the next several weeks. Mr. Wilson will provide another update at the February school board meeting.

Virtual Inclement Weather Plan

ACPS is currently in the process of requesting approval from MSDE to utilize virtual learning when schools are closed due to inclement weather. To date, ACPS has missed two days due to inclement weather (September 1st and January 7th), and will continue to use built-in snow days until two more have been exhausted. If approved, ACPS will prepare to use virtual snow days after the next two have been used. ACPS has a ratio of 1:1 for devices, and more than 90% of students have access to reliable internet. Students in areas without access to the internet may receive a snow day packet or be given ample time to complete any missed assignments. During a virtual snow day, there will be a minimum of 4 hours of synchronous instruction for all students somewhere between the hours of 8 a.m. and 12-12:30 p.m. Attendance will be taken for all students and teachers as well.

As of October 2021, every IEP developed and reviewed contains a description of how a student's IEP can be delivered during emergency conditions. In the event of a virtual inclement weather day, each student's IEP will be implemented in accordance with each one's individually developed emergency conditions plan.

Mr. Blank reminded parents that announcements concerning school delays and closures will come from the Office of Public Information and will be posted on the school system's website, the ACPS Facebook and Twitter pages, and sent out via the Blackboard mass notification system no later than 5:30 a.m. The information will also be sent to all local media outlets to publicize.

The ACPS virtual inclement weather day plan, if approved, will be posted on the ACPS website and will be communicated with all staff, parents and students. Until approval from MSDE is granted, ACPS will continue with regular school closures for inclement weather days.

Testing Updates

Mrs. Trina Simpson, ACPS Assistant Supervisor of Accountability and Assessment, provided the school board with updates on early fall assessments 2021. Previous years' scores were provided as a range of 650-850 in English Language Arts, math, and science where problems are assigned a point value. Early fall 2021 scores are provided as a percent of problems correct. For example, if a student achieved 15 correct out of 20 problems, they received a 75%. Additionally, in previous years, students tested for 280 minutes in ELA and for 160 minutes in both math and science. For early fall 2021, students tested for 140 minutes in ELA and for 60 minutes in both math and science. Previously, scores were reported as one of five performance levels (Not Yet Met, Partially Met, Approached, Met, Exceeded). Early fall 2021 scores are reported as one of three performance levels (Approached Expectations, Met Expectations, Exceeded Expectations).

For the MCAP 2019, the percent of ACPS students that "met" or "exceeded" expectations outperformed the state level in 14 of 17 tested areas. For early fall 2021, ACPS fell below the state average in all but one area (math). It is concluded that because ACPS has a high number of students in subgroups of Economically Disadvantaged and Special Education, and while in-person instruction is more beneficial for all students, these student subgroups are impacted at an even greater level in the absence of in-person learning.

Early fall 2021 assessment results are as follows:

- ELA (Allegany County): 71% Approached Expectations; 25% Met Expectations; 4% Exceeded Expectations
 - ELA (Maryland): 66% Approached Expectations; 28% Met Expectations; 6% Exceeded Expectations
- Math (Allegany County): 88% Approached Expectations; 9% Met Expectations; 3% Exceeded Expectations
 - Math (Maryland): 87% Approached Expectations; 9% Met Expectations; 4% Exceeded Expectations

According to Mrs. Simpson, the Pearson testing site has launched many new features that will be beneficial when ACPS is back to comparable data. All school principals have been trained on the Pearson platform, and upcoming trainings are scheduled for assistant principals, school counselors, test coordinators, and others.

Consider Second Reading of School Safety and Security Policy (File: ECAE)

The school board approved the second reading of the above policy, whose purpose is “to provide safe, orderly, and caring learning environments in which all students feel comfortable in adherence to the Maryland Safe to Learn Act of 2018.” The policy states “All members of the educational community share the responsibility for maintaining a positive and secure school setting. To this end, the BOE is authorized and empowered to employ School Security Employees to work in cooperation with system administrators, and in conjunction with the existing School Resource Officers, employed through other local law enforcement agencies, to enhance the day-to-day safety and security of all school facilities, faculty, staff and students.”

NEW BUSINESS**Huber & Michaels Audit**

Mr. Ed Huber of Huber and Michaels provided the school board with a financial report and reviewed several highlights from the report. In the auditors’ opinion, the financial statements for the Board of Education present fairly in all material respects as of June 30, 2021, which is an unmodified opinion. Mr. Huber highlighted the Fund Balance sheet, which includes the general fund, restricted, food service, and school construction. The school board’s unassigned general fund balance is \$32,477,000; the restricted fund carries no fund balance; the food service fund balance is \$12,580; and the school construction fund balance is \$1,006,000. The net change in the general fund balance was a surplus of \$6,115,000; the net change in the food service fund balance was a deficit of \$83,000; and the net change in the school construction fund balance was a surplus of \$1,531,000. The technology fund, which shares the activities with various computer systems within Allegany County, had a deficit of \$49,267. In regards to budget to actual for the last fiscal year, ACPS had actual revenues that were approximately \$1 million less than budgeted. Mr. Huber noted, however, that that was made up of all of the fund balance, and the board did not utilize any of the \$1,420,000 of the prior year’s fund balance. Additionally, the total expenditures were \$7,002,000 less than budgeted, and this combination of the two resulted in the more than \$6 million fund balance for the current fiscal year. Finally, each school in ACPS had a positive fund balance at the end of the last fiscal year.

Board Budget Priorities

Mr. Larry McKenzie, ACPS Chief Financial Officer, asked the school board to review the draft of the FY 2023 budget priorities, which are as follows:

- Make every effort to modernize current student programs and associated equipment and curriculum needs based on student interest and enrollment with a focus on current and future CTE programs.
- Appropriate CARES and Blueprint funding for technological needs both within the classroom and at home. In addition, provide robust educational recovery programs throughout the school year and during the summer to include recovery of learning loss and food service availability across all grade levels.
- Maintain and enhance student safety and mental health by providing licensed mental health and/or social worker support based upon demonstrated student need. Continue to maintain and enhance school safety as possible considering local law enforcement recommendations and the Maryland Center for School Safety Policies and Regulations.
- Make every effort to provide employees with negotiated benefits, including salary and health insurance benefits such that their take home pay would not be less due to increased employee shared costs of health insurance, and give raises if possible.

Mrs. Fraley asked for some modifications to these budget priorities, which will be reviewed and approved at the February meeting.

Superintendent Recommendation

Mr. Blank took the opportunity to recognize and thank ACPS employees for their tireless work in maintaining the continuity of learning, keeping schools open and safe, and striving to keep students healthy, active, and educated under the day-to-day conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff is committed to in-person education and is going above and beyond to keep this commitment. In recognition of this hard work, Mr. Blank recommended to the board giving all employees a “Retention Bonus” for continuing to strive for excellence and putting students first. His specific recommendations are as follows:

- Substitute employee rates to be changed to the long-term substitute rates for the remainder of the 2021-2022 school year.
- All part-time, contractual and temporary employees to receive a one-time payment before the appropriate tax of \$300 in the month of February if they have worked at least 50% of the days available since the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year.
- All permanent employees, excluding the superintendent, to receive before the appropriate tax a \$600 addition to one of their paychecks in the month of February.

Mr. Blank also thanked the HR Department and the negotiation groups for working collaboratively to make this recommendation. The school board approved this recommendation by the superintendent.

Consider School Board Communication Policy

The school board voted to table this policy until the February board meeting.

Consider Repealing of Student Harassment, Bullying, Cyberbullying, Intimidation, Violence Policy (File: JBA)

In December, the state Board of Education issued a new model bullying, harassment, and intimidation policy and required all local school systems to develop their own policy following this model by February 2022. ACPS currently has a policy, file JBA, that is in need of substantial changes in order to meet the state's requirement. Since just amending their current policy would be too difficult, the policy committee has recommended that the school board vote to repeal the current policy and simultaneously replace it with a new one (see below). The school board voted unanimously to repeal this policy.

Consider First Reading of Hiring and Promotions (File: GCD)

The school board approved the first reading of the above policy, whose purpose is "to provide for the hiring and promotion of all classes of employees." The policy states "The BOE shall employ individuals in the positions the Board considers necessary for the operation of the school system. In accordance with state law, the Superintendent shall recommend, and the Board shall approve, all certified personnel and the Superintendent shall appoint all non-certified personnel."

Consider First Reading of New Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Policy (File: JBA)

The school board approved the first reading of the above policy, whose purpose is "to state the Board's position regarding student harassment, bullying, cyberbullying, intimidation, or violence." The policy states, "All students have the right to be free from bullying, harassment, or intimidation. The Board is committed to providing a safe, productive, and inclusive learning environment. Bullying problems are symptomatic of relationship problems best addressed holistically by students, schools, parents/caregivers, and the entire community. ACPS should be places where students are surrounded by caring adults who encourage students to treat others with kindness and empathy, while helping to build a relationship-focused, welcoming, supportive school environment fostering academic and personal growth for every student."

Vote to Meet in Open Meeting January 18, 2022

Mr. Blank requested that the school board hold a special open meeting on Tuesday, January 18, 2022, at noon at the Central Office to approve a bid, which will be received on January 14th, for an upcoming project so as not to delay this project and thus run the risk of not having sufficient time to acquire the necessary materials. The board voted unanimously to hold the special meeting.

Vote to Meet in Executive Session February 8, 2022, as Necessary

The school board voted to meet in Executive Session on February 8, 2022, pending any appeals or unfinished business. The time and location of the meeting is TBD.

CONSTITUENTS' COMMENTS***Mr. Martin, School Bus Driver***

Mr. Martin addressed the school board regarding student behavior on school buses that result in referrals. His comments can be heard at the 39.08-minute mark of the [recorded video](#).

BOARD MEMBER UPDATES***Mrs. Tammy Fraley***

Mrs. Fraley reminded everyone that the Legislative Session begins soon and MABE is currently in the process of meeting with committees and chairs to discuss issues, including the Blueprint. She encouraged individuals to reach out to the school board if they have any questions so that they can be informed members of the community during this process.

Mrs. Fraley also noted that she has received inquiries from concerned parents regarding the impact of quarantine on both staff and students and asked Mr. Blank and staff to research what the school system can do for parents who may be nervous about sending their children to school during this recent surge of COVID-19. She stated that even though the school system is implanting shorter quarantine times, students and staff will still be impacted. She is hopeful that there are other options for parents to consider aside from home schooling.