

BOARDROOM CHATTER

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BOARD OF EDUCATION

Mrs. Tammy Fraley, President
Mrs. Debra Frank, Vice President
Dr. Edward Root
Mr. Robert Farrell
Dr. David Bohn
Mr. Jeff Blank, Interim Superintendent

INTERIM SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

A Return to School – Health Metrics

Mr. Blank, Interim Superintendent of Schools, provided the school board with an update on health metrics in Allegany County. The positivity rate, which is targeted at 5% or less, over the last two weeks (November 23-December 4) had a low of 13.66% and a high of 17.90%. As of December 7th, the positivity rate was 17.44%. Cases per 100,000, which is targeted at 15 or less, over the same two-week period had a low of 136.33 and a high of 171.84. As of December 7th, the number of cases per 100,000 was 189.28.

As of December 4th (over the same two-week time period), a total of 121 ACPS staff members have been affected by COVID in the following ways: 41 positive cases; 59 close contacts; 15 with COVID-like illnesses; and 6 close contacts with someone with COVID-like illnesses.

Mr. Blank noted that all of these statics were taken directly from the official Allegany County website. He also mentioned that it is still unknown at this time where in line educators will fall to receive a vaccine, when one is available. However, even once a vaccine is available, ACPS staff will continue to follow mask and social distancing guidelines as well as strict hand-washing and health measures.

INSTRUCTIONAL UPDATES: Review of the First Nine Weeks

Dr. Kim Kalbaugh, ACPS Chief Academic Officer, provided the school board with an update and review of the first marking period of the 2020-2021 school year. There were 47 instructional days with online distance learning available to students. Of those 47 days, there were 34 days in the nine weeks where in-person instruction was available to some student populations, including students without connectivity, Career Center students, students with significant disabilities attending specialized programs, high school students due to non-engagement, and elementary students. In total, 3,520 students returned for in-person learning during marking period 1 (MP1). ACPS was ready to begin transitioning to the hybrid schedule for middle school students when the increasing health metrics in the county forced the district to return to virtual learning.

Dr. Kalbaugh provided several other highlights from MP1. During the first marking period, the attendance for the entire school system was nearly 95%. In reviewing the overall district attendance for the school year as of the meeting date, the percent is at 94%. Attendance record keeping is quite difficult as schools have to account for synchronous attendance, asynchronous attendance through Schoology logins, and attendance through learning packets during virtual learning. All schools had individuals assigned to monitor and address any attendance concerns. Letters were also sent to parents from the Central Office for accumulation of absences. All schools were provided with the protocols for documenting attendance calls and teleconferences through a daily log. In addition, administrators, PPWs, school counselors, and other support staff were tasked with contacting students who were consistently marked absent. The PPWS and School Resource Officers were also tasked with conducting home visits to students who were habitually or chronically truant.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Approve minutes for meeting held on November 10, 2020.
2. Approve routine personnel actions for the period of November 1-30, 2020.
3. Receive school construction/maintenance report for the period of November 1-30, 2020.
4. Receive Information Technology monthly report for November 2020.
5. Receive monthly financial report.
6. Accept bid from Hite Roofing for the replacement of the roof at Bel Air Elementary for \$412,000.
7. Accept bid from C&T Mechanical for boiler replacement at Braddock for \$884,853.
8. Accept bid from C&T Mechanical for boiler replacement at Washington for \$892,994.

Each school system was directed to administer diagnostic exams during MP1. These diagnostics were used to diagnose student learning gaps, particularly in the areas of mathematics and English Language Arts/Reading. The diagnostic information is being used by teachers to adjust teaching. The specialists and teachers are using the information to determine which standards and proficiency levels need to be addressed in each particular content area. A particular focus is on deficiencies in skills, processes, and understanding.

INSTRUCTIONAL UPDATES CONT.

The school teams are using the data to determine instructional priorities for each class in order to modify teaching or re-teaching strategies for the students. Data will be collected throughout the year to assess if students are moving in the right direction toward proficiency in Math and ELA/reading.

A list of the diagnostic assessments were included in the ACPS recovery plan, and the results of the diagnostics were sent to MSDE for the first term metrics report. The data included results for the percent of students scoring below grade level expectations, percent at expectations, and percent scoring above expectations. It has been very challenging to provide the rigor of instruction that takes place through in-person learning, so ACPS does have some significant gaps that are being addressed

One of the first groups that ACPS brought back for in-person learning was students without connectivity. Unfortunately, when the health metrics increased and the district was forced to return to a fully virtual learning model, it also meant that these students would need learning packets until it is deemed a reasonable and feasible option to return students to school. 86 students are currently using learning packets. Of those students, nearly 25% are struggling with completion or returning assignments. In some cases, the parent has informed the principal that work is ready for pickup and the PPW is being sent to pick up the completed assignments. In a few cases, illness has prevented a student from completing some of the work. All schools are directed to follow up with these students and provide additional support, as needed.

Staff reviewed the MP1 Grade Transcript records for MP1, specifically for MP1 grades that were F's or failing. At the high school level, there were over 15,000 course reports with a failure rate of 16% (2,523 reports). At the middle school level, there were over 12,000 transcript records, with a failure rate of 14% (1,741). At the elementary level, there were over 14,000 records with a failure rate of 1% (170 records). The data DOES NOT reflect a percent for individual student failures for the first marking period, but only course failures at the three levels: elementary, middle, and high. The grade transcripts for MP1 were sorted to review the percent of course transcripts with an F grade for the first marking period. For example, one high school student could potentially fail seven courses for the first marking period. All of these courses would then be reflected in the course rate failure percentage for high school.

In the short term, administrators have asked teachers to consider allowing an extension beyond the marking period to take a failing grade F and increase it to partial mastery through the completion of missed or failed assignments. Teachers are responsible for conveying this opportunity to their students. In the intermediate term, the school's PST has been tasked with facilitating a phone conference with the parent and the student, particularly for middle and high school students to determine what supports are needed to help students demonstrate a higher level of mastery.

During the virtual learning, an office hour/student support time is provided within the teacher's schedule to provide additional support for students struggling with their academics. In addition, a district wide tutoring program was implemented to help students with academic issues. The funding for the program was feasible through a tutoring grant that the district was awarded. Approximately, 200+ students from elementary through high school have taken advantage of the tutoring program. The grant ends at the end of December, but ACPS is hopeful that other funding can be allocated to provide tutoring services during the second half of the school year. There is also a virtual after-school program for middle school students and an after-school virtual credit recovery program in place to help high school students regain credits needed to meet graduation requirements. The second rotation is beginning at this time, and there will be at least one more credit recovery rotation in the spring.

The Spring 2021 annual MCAP (Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program) is scheduled to take place if there is a least partial in-person learning. Due to the current circumstances, the testing window is scheduled to open earlier than usual, but the expectation from MSDE to cover at least 80% of the instruction prior to testing does not seem practicable considering that testing could begin as early as February 22nd.

INSTRUCTIONAL UPDATES CONT.

The ACM/ACPS early college advisory committee for P-TECH met virtually last week to discuss the progress of P-TECH and early college students. ACPS has two seniors who are enrolled in the Cybersecurity P-TECH Program who are on the four-year accelerated pathway and are scheduled to graduate with not only their high school diploma, but also their 2-year college degree from ACM. Melissa Kaye, P-TECH coordinator, has been working with students and providing tutoring services for students in the program. Staff is also working on the High School Programs of Study for the 2021-2022 school year and plan to begin scheduling for the 2021-2022 school year after the end of the first semester. For next year, ACPS will add two more AG semester elective courses to the Programs of Study including Animal Vet Science (Small) in the Fall and Animal Vet Science (Large) in the Spring.

Animal Vet Science (small) will investigate scientific concepts relating to the care of animals. Students will study the nutrition, safety, training, health, and general care of companion animals. The course will focus on dogs, cats, rabbits, birds, reptiles, and fish. Laboratory activities will provide opportunities for problem-solving through practical applications to learn scientific concepts. Animal Vet Science (large) will investigate scientific concepts relating to the biology of domestic animals. The course will focus on cattle, swine, and sheep. Specific topics will include taxonomy and classification, cell structure and function, biological systems, anatomy and physiology, nutrition, genetics, reproduction, distribution and adaptation and selection and evaluation, as well as meat sciences. Laboratory activities will provide opportunities for problem-solving through practical applications to learn scientific concepts. Leadership, entrepreneurial skills, and application to current issues will also be explored in both courses.

Dr. Kalbaugh encouraged parents and students who have the ability to engage in the synchronous instruction through Schoology to make most of the learning experience and to make sure they engage through both the video and microphone capabilities of Schoology. She also encouraged parents to ensure that students turn on their videos and microphones if at all possible so that students are able to actively participate in their learning. Being able to see and hear the students and have that interaction can certainly enhance the learning experience for the children. It also holds students accountable.

Finally, in conclusion, Dr. Kalbaugh took a moment to acknowledge and thank the ACPS teachers and all of the central office and school-based personnel for their diligence, work ethic and continued commitment to students. The instructional supervisors and school-based administrators have been tasked with conducting virtual walkthroughs and observations in all classrooms during the school year. She has received numerous calls and emails detailing some of the great work that teachers are doing in their efforts to ensure that the standards are effectively taught, achievement gaps are being addressed, and that teachers are motivating and engaging the students through various teaching strategies and techniques.

Huber & Michaels Audit

Mr. Ed Huber of Huber & Michaels provided the school board with an update on the results of the school board's FY2020 financial audit. According to Mr. Huber, the financial statements present fairly in all material respects the financial position of the Board of Education. This is an unmodified opinion, which is always the goal of any audit. Mr. Huber reviewed several highlights from the report, including the balance sheets, a comparison of budget to actual, and the positivity of all schools' funds.

Virtual Learning Format Update

Mr. Blank recommended to the school board, for planning purposes and based on current health metrics in Allegany County, to have all ACPS students remain in a fully-virtual learning format through the end of this year and into the beginning of January 2021. The school board will further discuss return to school plans, the availability of adequate staffing, and county health metrics at their January 12th meeting and will provide further guidance at that time.

Vote to Meet in Executive Session in January 2021 as Necessary

The school board voted to meet in Executive Session on Tuesday, January 12, 2021, pending any appeals or unfinished business. All meetings will continue to be held virtually until further notice. The public may watch the livestream of the meeting at <http://bit.ly/ACPSMedia>. Community members may submit public comment via email to comments@acpsmd.org. Emails must be received no later than 5 p.m. on Monday, January 11, 2021. During the public comment portion of the meeting, emails will be read in the order in which they were received. Personal information will not be withheld and anonymous submissions will not be considered. The Board President or her designee will read the constituent's name in addition to the public comment.

BOARD MEMBER AND SMOB COMMENTS

Mr. Mitchell Septoff, Student Member of the Board

Mitchell noted that it is important for students to be more aware of the severity of the pandemic and its effects on our area so that the decision to remain in a fully virtual learning format is more understandable. He also mentioned that students need to take responsibility for completing assignments on time and keep up with their school work to help reduce course failures.

Mr. Robert Farrell

Mr. Farrell took the opportunity to thank outgoing school board member, Dr. Ed Root, for his service and wished incoming school board member, Crystal Bender, good luck on her upcoming appointment to the BOE. He also mentioned that he looks forward to working with her in the future.

Dr. David Bohn

Dr. Bohn echoed Mr. Farrell's sentiments towards Dr. Root and noted that he enjoyed the opportunity to work with him over the past year. Dr. Bohn also welcomed Crystal Bender to the school board.

Dr. Ed Root

Dr. Root thanked his colleagues for their kind words and noted that he is hopeful that the new school board will be able to work through these difficult times. He wished Crystal Bender luck in her upcoming role as a school board member, and reminded the group not to forget the purpose of the school system – to educate students.

Mrs. Deb Frank

Mrs. Frank, like her colleagues, thanked Dr. Root for his service and welcomed Crystal Bender to the school board. Mrs. Frank also noted that she has been unhappy about comments being made on social media by some elected officials disparaging the school board's decision to remain fully virtual and the work of ACPS teachers and staff. She strongly discouraged this type of rhetoric and stated that everyone needs to proactively work together to find better solutions to help slow the spread of this deadly pandemic.

Mrs. Tammy Fraley

Mrs. Fraley concluded by also thanking Dr. Root for his service and dedication to the students of Allegany County Public Schools over the years and wished him well in the future. Mrs. Fraley also noted earlier during New Business, and after much discussion regarding tutoring services, that the school board will provide funding, if necessary, in 2021 for the continuation of tutoring services for students.