

BOARDROOM CHATTER

PUBLICATION PREPARED BY ACPS PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Vaccine Update

Ms. Jenelle Mayer, Health Officer for the Allegany County Health Department, provided the school board with a COVID-19 data update. Allegany County's COVID-19 case rate is currently 68.77 cases per 100,000 population compared to the state's case rate of 18.63 cases per 100,000 population. Allegany County's percent positivity is 12.54% compared to the state's percent positivity of 4.61%. Allegany County is currently in the CDC's COVID-19 community transmission category of "high".

Regarding vaccinations, 43.28% of Allegany County's population is fully vaccinated, while 63.03% of Maryland's population is fully vaccinated. 26.9% of Allegany County teens age 12-17 are fully vaccinated. 58.6% of Maryland teens age 12-17 are fully vaccinated. Additionally, 33.1% of Allegany County teens age 12-17 have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. 69.5% of Maryland teens age 12-17 have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

Ms. Mayer also reminded the school board and public about isolation and quarantine procedures. The ACHD follows guidance issued by the CDC as well as guidance issued in conjunction by the Maryland Department of Health and the Maryland State Department of Education. According to updated guidance from the CDC, if all students are masked indoors, they are exempt from quarantine if they are at least three feet away from a positive case in the classroom and they are not symptomatic. If an infected student has siblings in the home, those siblings would also need to complete a full quarantine, which would begin at their last exposure.

Ms. Mayer noted that some quarantining will still occur because masks are not required outdoors. If a vaccinated student is a close contact with a positive case outdoors, they will not have to quarantine if they are not showing symptoms; however, if an unvaccinated student is a close contact with a positive case outdoors, they would be required to quarantine, regardless of being symptomatic or not. The same holds true for students on school buses because a minimum social distance of six feet cannot be maintained. The ACHD recommends a 14-day quarantine period as the safest option before returning to school buildings.

Additionally, if a person has symptoms and a positive test for COVID-19 and is fully vaccinated, they may return to school when it has been ten days since the onset of symptoms and no fever for at least 24 hours without medication. All close contacts should quarantine except those who are fully vaccinated and are asymptomatic.

When the ACHD performs contact tracing, if students and staff are fully vaccinated but are a close contact to a positive case, they are not required to quarantine. They are, however, encouraged to wear a mask and take extra precautions monitoring symptoms as well as get a COVID-19 test at day 3-5. This rule is the same for staff, students, and the community at large. Contact tracing looks back 48 hours from the onset of symptoms of an individual, or if they are asymptomatic, 48 hours from a positive test result.

Finally, Ms. Mayer explained the definition of various designations necessary for reporting purposes. A classroom outbreak is defined as two positive cases in a classroom not living in the same household. A school wide outbreak is defined as three classroom/cohort outbreaks within a school. These designations do not change any of the quarantine or isolation procedures.

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

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Approve minutes for meetings held on August 3, 2021, and August 13, 2021.
2. Approve routine personnel actions for the period of August 1 - 31, 2021.
3. Receive school construction/maintenance report for the period of August 1 - 31, 2021.
4. Receive monthly IT report for July and August.
5. Receive monthly financial report.
6. Retiree Health Plan Subsidy 2021-2022
7. Approval of the bid award for Braddock Middle security vestibule project.
8. Approval of the FY2023 Capital Improvement Program
9. Approval of LAC re-appointments for 3-year terms
10. Approval of new Ethics Panel members: Skott Brill, Leah Alderman, Rayelle Davis

In closing, parents are encouraged to monitor their child for symptoms that could be related to COVID-19. If a student is experiencing any symptoms on the checklist they should not come to school until they are symptom-free. This remains true for any illness, not just COVID-19.

The ACHD continues to offer free drive up testing at the Allegany County Fairgrounds every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Results are typically available within two days or less.

Opening of 2021-2022 School Year

Mr. Blank provided the school board and the public with an update on the opening of schools. ACPS began the school year on August 25, 2021, with approximately 8,000 students back to buildings for in-person instruction. Mr. Blank took a moment to thank all of the school system's employees for their dedication and hard work that made this possible. Additionally, Mr. Blank also thanked the county's emergency management team for their assistance in making the decision to close schools on September 1st as the result of heavy rain and flooding from the hurricane.

School days are as normal as possible with the exception of lunch periods, where social distancing of six feet must be enforced so that students can remove their masks to eat. Extracurricular activities began in early August and have been proceeding as permitted by COVID-19 guidelines. Each classroom in ACPS has been equipped with a free-standing air purifier to add an extra layer of protection against COVID-19. These air purifiers have hepa filters and four speeds and a timer that can be adjusted depending on the size of the classroom.



Pictured is one of the air purifiers that ACPS purchased for each classroom.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Consider Second Reading of Nondiscrimination Policy (File: AC)

The school board approved the second reading of the above policy, whose purpose is "to affirm the BOE's commitment to maintaining an environment where all students and staff members conduct themselves in a manner built on mutual respect."

Consider Second Reading of Nondiscrimination – Equal Employment Opportunity Policy (File: GBA)

The school board approved the second reading of the above policy, whose purpose is "to state the Board's position regarding nondiscrimination in employment."

Consider Second Reading of Employee Use of Social Media (File: GBDA)

The school board approved the second reading of the above policy, whose purpose is "to provide standards for appropriate use of social media."

Consider Second Reading of Equal Educational Opportunity Policy (File: JB)

The school board approved the second reading of the above policy, which states "The BOE of Allegany County does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, gender-identity or expression, genetic information, age, national origin, religion, or disability in providing access to educational programs and activities."

NEW BUSINESS

School Calendar Adjustment

The first marking period of the 2021-2022 school year ends on Thursday, October 28, 2021. Friday, October 29, 2021 should be a 3-hour early dismissal for students with the afternoon set aside for teacher work time to complete marking period one grades. This was unintentionally omitted from the school calendar. School staff and parents will be notified of this adjustment to the calendar.

Discussion about a Virtual Option for Secondary Students/Adequate Instruction Options for Students in Quarantine

The school board voted in favor of Mr. Blank and his staff bringing back to them, without parameters, what options are available, whether it be about be virtual programming or quarantined students, and how ACPS can better their education while they are not in the classroom. A virtual option is currently available for elementary students. This information will be presented to the school board at the October 12th meeting.

Vote to Meet in Executive Session October 12, 2021, as Necessary

The school board voted to meet in Executive Session on October 12, 2021, pending any appeals or unfinished business. 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, October 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. The meeting time and location will be TBD.

BOARD MEMBER UPDATES & SMOB COMMENTS

Ms. Genevieve Batman, Alternate SMOB

Ms. Batman served as the alternate Student Member of the Board during the meeting as Ms. Brooklyn Noel had an athletic commitment that prohibited her from being there. There were no significant updates to report as schools are still in the process of creating their student councils and boards, which is where the majority of updates initiate. Ms. Batman noted that on behalf of the majority of ACPS students, they are in favor of face-to-face instruction and thanked the school board for facilitating the return to in-person learning. She feels that in-person learning will result in higher grades and test scores and will allow students the access to school-related functions and groups that many so desperately need. Ms. Batman also understands how logistically difficult it is to create space and programming for a virtual learning environment, but is hopeful that the school board will come up with a solution that allows all students to feel safe and comfortable in their learning environments.

Mrs. Tammy Fraley

Mrs. Fraley noted that the Maryland Association of Boards of Education will hold their annual conference in early October and that it is a great opportunity for school board members to network with other counties from across the state and share and learn each other's best practices.

Mrs. Fraley also noted that on August 26, 2021, the Maryland State Board of Education voted to approve an emergency regulation requiring face coverings in schools to help stop the spread of COVID-19. This mandate couldn't go into effect until it was reviewed and approved by the General Assembly's Joint Committee of Administration, Executive and Legislative Review (AELR). By law, this bipartisan panel of representatives from both the House of Delegates and the state Senate had to wait 10 business days from the state board's vote to vote on this emergency regulation. After hearing public testimony on September 14, 2021, the regulation passed 10-7 and will go into effect immediately and remain in effect until February 22, 2022.

Mr. Bob Farrell

Mr. Farrell voiced his disappointment with the AELR decision as he feels that local decisions are better made by local elected officials rather than be mandated by the state Board of Education, which is an appointed, not elected, body.

CONSTITUENTS' COMMENTS

Jason Haggerty, Parent

Mr. Haggerty addressed the school board regarding facemasks. His comments can be heard on the school board meeting recording at the 42:36 minute mark.