

# NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS



## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **For Immediate Release**

**Contact: Donna Booth, Clerk of the School Board**

**(804)529-6134**

[clerk@nucps.net](mailto:clerk@nucps.net)

**August 3, 2020 Lottsburg, VA**

The Northumberland County Public Schools' (NCPS) School Board met by audio calling method for a special called meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to meet with Dr. Richard Williams from the Three Rivers Health District and to reassess school reopening plans in relation to new guidance provided by the Virginia Department of Health (VDH). The public had access through audio conferencing as a result of COVID-19 guidelines.

### **Presentations**

Dr. Richard Williams presented new guidance from the VDH that features a COVID-19 Community Transmission Dashboard. The dashboard information is not available to the public; rather, the local Department of Health has access. On the dashboard, Northumberland County is located in the Eastern Region. As of Monday August 3, 2020, the Eastern Region was coded "Monderate" for Community Transmission. As a result, the VDH issued companion guidance for school divisions. When Community Transmission is labeled "substantial" or "moderate," then school divisions should follow Phase I or II reopening guidance as outlined by the Virginia Department of Education.

Local Health Departments will provide regional and local data, discuss data trends and implications, and provide local context to the trends. Dr. Williams discussed COVID-19 data, potential interventions, and reinforced the recommendations for Phase Guidance for Virginia Schools. He provided health advice and safety measures that school divisions can consider to make decisions on reopening. He felt certain that the spread of COVID-19 will be more prevalent in school settings. Although uncertain of the return for students, Dr. Williams felt that teachers can conform with the needed safety measures: social distancing, face coverings, and respiratory control. Dr. Williams emphasized that the health department maintains communication with the school division, and the school board makes the decision for returning to school.

Northumberland Elementary School Principal Mrs. Stephanie Baker presented information on a Phase II Return to School for PreK through third grade following a hybrid plan with fourth and fifth grade attending 100% virtual learning.

Mrs. Virginia Booth, Director of Data Accountability, presented the results of the staff survey that gauged employee perceptions regarding reopening schools during the global pandemic.

# NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Mrs. Saunee Hamlett, Director of Food Service; Mr. Jeff Brann, Director of Operations & Maintenance; and Mr. Bob Gilbert, Director of Technology gave updates on returning to school. Mrs. Hamlett informed the Board that meals will be provided for all students. Students attending school in the hybrid plan will receive two days of breakfast and lunch meals in school and three days of breakfast and lunch meals to carry home. Students who attend 100% virtual school will continue to receive breakfast and lunch meals for five days with delivery on Wednesday. Mr. Jeff Brann informed the Board that schools follow a schedule for sanitation and deep cleaning. Mr. Brann stated he has inventory of PPE supplies (gloves, masks and cleaning supplies) which will cover four weeks of in person learning at NES. Mr. Brann stated he will continue to request PPE supplies but noted difficulty in finding the PPE at this time. Mr. Bob Gilbert informed the Board that 1:1 computers for students are ordered and provided an update of wireless connectivity with mifi, hotspots and bus routers.

## **Superintendent Reopening Recommendations**

Dr. Wargo presented six recommendations for reopening school for the Fall 2020:

1. Teachers return on Monday, August 17, 2020. Teacher workdays and professional development will be provided August 17 through Thursday, September 3. During this time teachers will be trained on the Canvas Learning Management System, Virtual Virginia, and virtual teaching best practices including synchronous and asynchronous learning. Teachers will be able to plan virtual instruction which will be used for virtual learning when students return.
2. Teachers and staff will be off Friday, September 4, through Monday, September 7 (Labor Day).
3. The First Day of School for Students will be Tuesday, September 8.
4. Students in grades four through twelve will attend 100% virtual instruction.
5. Students in grades Pre-K through third and special populations will attend school on a hybrid schedule in accordance with Phase II guidelines.
6. The calendar may be revised based on VDOE recommendations for attendance expectations and instructional seat hours at any time.

The Board was provided with the Northumberland County Public School 2020-2021 Instructional Plan. [Click here to view Plan.](#)

## **Public Comments**

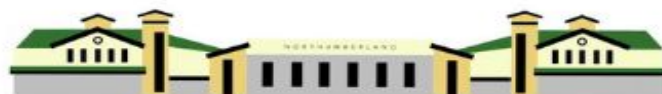
The Clerk read five emails received:

- Mrs. Pam Woolard endorsed in person instruction for elementary school students;
- Mrs. Lynne Haynie supported face-to-face instruction for elementary school students;
- Mrs. Carol Smith requested the Board to consider in-person instruction;
- Mrs. Claire Given stated that opening schools is a careless decision;
- Mrs. Beverly Fallin supported 100% face-to-face back to school;

# NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS



NES



NMS

NHS

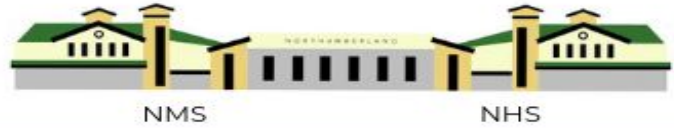
The following are summaries of the public comments:

- Mr. Alexis Wormley is a parent and coach. He questioned if Prek-3 was offered 100%? Dr Wargo informed Mr. Wormley that there are two choices 100% virtual and Hybrid. Hybrid Learning is when students are in person two days, two days virtual learning and one day home while the school is being cleaned. This is the current plan. New information from the Department of Health is being considered . Parents are offered a 100% virtual learning.
- Mr. Steve Berman is a NHS parent, golf coach and community member. Mr. Berman supports 100% virtual learning. Mr. Berman stated that he can not imagine how the school division can guarantee protection with in-person learning. He understands that some student need in-person instruction, but how can someone gamble by deciding in-person learning.
- Dr. Linwood Blizzard is Reverend of Macadonia Church and NHS faculty member. He appreciates the special called meeting to give updates. He requests the Board to consider the technology gap and equity gap when making their decision. He stated that there is a definite internet access gap in the County. He urged the Board to consider the equity and technology access to education when making their decision.
- Mrs. Tara Brent is a parent of NMS and NES students and a community member. She questioned why school should be opening physically if the school board meeting had to be virtually. When the speaker Dr. Williams stated that he would not send his own grandchildren to school, she does not feel comfortable sending her children to school. Mrs Brent stated that it is not safe with the science involved to have students return to school.
- Dr. Carolyn Crockett thanked Dr. Wargo for the wonderful job providing updates. Her concerns were for teachers and is there a plan for these teachers. Dr.Wargo stated that the school division follows the Department of Labor special guidelines and standards and the American Disability Act rules when employees request accommodations to work. Dr. Wargo indicated that each case is reviewed with sensitivity and confidentiality on a case by case basis and decisions will represent employees' rights at all times.
- Mrs. Jamie Segal works in the healthcare industry and wanted to inform the Board that this pandemic is not age specific and is a mystery to all. There is tremendous stress and emotions involved.

## Board Comments

Mrs. Dana O'Bier understands and sympathizes with medical community concerns. She expressed the other side of COVID: concern for the mental health, depression, and suicide rates. It is important to us to honor your decision as parents to send their child to school. Mrs. O'Bier stated students need some sense of normal and reopening schools will support the wellbeing and mental health of our students.

# NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Mrs. Gayle Sterrett stated she is not comfortable opening school for in-person instruction at all as the new data provided by Dr. Williams indicates. There is too much that is unknown about the disease. She is concerned about the uncertain data and safety protection for staff and students since the move to substantial transmission. She referenced the uptick in COVID-19 numbers in Northumberland County, the Northern Neck, and the Eastern region. Mrs. Sterrett indicated that she is not ready to take the risk and does not support opening at all.

Mr. Carl Perez stated that no one wants to make this type of decision referencing how to safely reopen schools. He stated that he could not guarantee his own children will return home safe each day. He also asked how each child can receive a quality education with limited resources such as lack of Broadband connectivity. Mr. Perez concluded with his support of 100% virtual learning for the first nine weeks of the fall semester reassess in November.

## **Action**

Board Member Dana O'Bier moved to return to school following recommendations of the Superintendent as presented.

1. Teachers return on Monday, August 17, 2020. Teacher workdays and professional development will be provided August 17 through Thursday, September 3. During this time teachers will be trained on the Canvas Learning Management System, Virtual Virginia, and virtual teaching best practices including synchronous and asynchronous learning. Teachers will be able to plan virtual instruction which will be used for virtual learning when students return.
2. Teachers and staff will be off Friday, September 4, through Monday, September 7 (Labor Day).
3. The First Day of School for Students will be Tuesday, September 8.
4. Students in grades four through twelve will attend 100% virtual instruction.
5. Students in grades Pre-K through third and special populations will attend school on a hybrid schedule in accordance with Phase II guidelines.
6. The calendar may be revised based on VDOE recommendations for attendance expectations and instructional seat hours at any time.

Board Member Cheryl Davis seconded the motion. Roll Call Vote: Mrs. Sterrett, Nay; Mr. Perez, Nay; Dr. Davis, Aye; Mrs. O'Bier, Aye; Mrs. Christopher, Aye. Motion carried: 3 Ayes; 2 Nays.