

Special Called Board Meeting Highlights
October 9, 2020

The Gates County Board of Education met in a special called session on Friday, October 9, 2020, at the Gates County Courthouse. Chairman Ray Felton called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. and noted there would not be any public comments. The following board members were present: Mr. Ray Felton, Mrs. Glendale Boone, Mr. Leslie Byrum, Mrs. Sallie Ryan, and Mrs. Amanda Pacitto.

Mrs. Glendale Boone made a motion to approve the agenda. Mr. Leslie Byrum seconded the motion. Chairman Felton called for a vote, and the motion was unanimously approved.

There was a moment of silence, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Felton asked Dr. Barry Williams to present his recommendation. Dr. Williams read the following statement:

I would like to begin with a sincere “Thank You” to the teachers, students, parents, school administrators and the central office staff for all the hard work that is being done to continue the education of students during the world-wide pandemic. I truly appreciate all that you have done and continue to do for Gates County Schools.

In August of 2020, Gates County Schools reopened under Plan C, which provides virtual/remote learning for all students. Currently students are receiving instruction 5 days per week through virtual platforms and through remote learning packets. There are challenges, such as access to the internet, due to broadband availability and lack of cell tower reception in some areas of the county. However, after much sacrifice by parents and hard work and dedication by teachers and administration, we have progressed through the learning curve and are providing consistent and quality instruction to our students while we continue to address connectivity issues.

As we near the end of the 1st 9 weeks, I would like to recommend that all Gates County Schools continue on Plan C for the 2nd 9 weeks. I am making this recommendation for the following reasons:

- ✓ Since the reopening of schools for 2020-2021, we have had 4 employees test positive for COVID-19, 2 at the central office and 2 at elementary schools along with several employees who have had to quarantine.
- ✓ The teachers have made a huge transition from traditional instruction to virtual/remote instruction, which has required a tremendous amount of work. They feel that they and their students are becoming comfortable with the learning platform and they also indicate they are seeing much success with their students’ learning.
- ✓ Moving to Plan B will require another shift, which will combine face-to-face instruction with virtual/remote instruction. Having time to transition to Plan B is vital to the teachers.
- ✓ Gates County Schools has a population of employees who fall into the “high-risk” category for being susceptible to contracting COVID-19: over 65 years-of-age, type-2 diabetes,

- ✓ obesity-BMI over 30, cancer survivors, low immunity systems, and other pre-existing conditions.
- ✓ Finally, over 50% of our staff have indicated to their administration that they do not currently feel comfortable returning to school where there would be a large number of people in the buildings, which can increase the possibility for exposure.

Gates County is a family and through tough times, we pull together for what is best for our students, our families, and our staff and I truly believe that staying on Plan C for the 2nd 9 weeks is our best option.

Board Member Comments:

Sallie Ryan:

- Younger students need to be back face to face prior to January 6th
- Staying on Plan C will require summer school in 2021 in order to catch students up
- Need to give special attention to students that are struggling

Amanda Pacitto:

- From a parent perspective she sees how parents and students are struggling
- Feels students need to be back in school
- Need to return to some form of normal

Leslie Byrum:

- Received many emails from parents and teachers
- Internet connectivity is a definite problem
- We need to contact the governor, our senators and representatives to help get better internet service for the county
- We have several teachers and bus drivers that are high risk
- Do not want to lose employees if we choose to go face to face. We need to make sure everyone is safe.
- Replacing teachers with substitutes will decrease quality of instruction in core subjects.
- Need to stay on Plan C for the next 9 weeks
- Encourage vote for House Bill 1005
- Need to be creative in ways to protect our staff
- Board members and administration need to meet in workshops
- Voted yes for Athletics so they could be included in the conference schedule with other schools
- Emergency Leave is no longer available for employees.
- Feels virtual instruction is better than Plan B
- Concern about having to test students at school
- Difficult decision
- Every child needs to be treated equally but Federal Law does not allow this with students with disabilities. (IDEA and 504)

Glendale Boone:

- Would like to see K-5 back in school
- Support Plan C until next semester
- Require a lot of work to go with Plan A or Plan B
- Have to consider everyone when making decision

Ray Felton:

- Sincerely cares about Gates County and the students even though he does not have children in the school system
- Sympathizes with parents that are struggling with virtual learning
- Concerned about losing teachers if we return to face to face instruction
- Difficult to replace teachers
- Believes virtual instruction will be the solution to teacher shortage
- Have to think about the impact the decision will have on the future

Mr. Leslie Byrum made a motion to stay on Plan C for the next nine weeks, and the board and administration make a commitment to prepare to move to Plan A for elementary schools, in January. Mrs. Glendale Boone seconded the motion. Chairman Felton called for a vote and the motion was unanimously approved.

Mrs. Glendale Boone made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Leslie Byrum seconded the motion. Chairman Felton called for a vote and the motion was unanimously approved.

There being no further business, Chairman Felton adjourned the meeting at 5:00 p.m.