

Gates County Board of Education
Regular Session Meeting
September 2, 2021

The Gates County Board of Education met for their regularly scheduled board meeting on Thursday, September 2, 2021, at Central Middle School. Chairman Ray Felton called the meeting to order at 6:06 p.m. In attendance were the following board members: Mrs. Glendale Boone, Mrs. Sallie Ryan, and Ms. Heimbecker (formally Ms. Picatto). Board member Leslie Byrum was unable to be in attendance.

The motion to approve the meeting agenda was given by Ms. Boone. Ms. Heimbecker seconded the motion. A call to vote was given. Each board member stated their vote and the motion to approve the meeting agenda was unanimous.

Following the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag, Mr. Felton read a portion of the school board policy concerning public comments. Policy 2310 states:

PUBLIC COMMENT

Each month, the first part of at least one regularly scheduled board meeting will be set aside for citizens to address the board through public comment. Each speaker will receive three minutes to present comments; however, the public comment session will not exceed 30 minutes total except by majority vote of the board. A sign-up sheet will be available 30 minutes before the meeting begins for any individual or group to indicate their desire to address the board. During the public comment period, the board chair will recognize speakers in the order in which they signed in. Substitute speakers will not be permitted and speakers may not donate any portion of their time to another speaker. If a speaker is unable to present all of his or her information within the specified time limit, the speaker may provide the board with the additional information in written form. If an unusually large number of people requests to speak, a majority of the board may decide to reduce the time for each individual or to require the designation of a spokesperson for each group of persons supporting or opposing the same positions. At any time, the board may establish additional procedures to ensure that public comment sessions proceed in an efficient and orderly manner.

Board members will not respond to individuals who address the board except to request clarification of points made by the presenter.

Except in cases of emergency, information received during presentations will not be acted upon at the time it is received. It will take unanimous vote of the board members present to take action on a presentation considered to be of an unusual or emergency nature at the time it is presented.

Disruptions by any person or persons of a public meeting will be subject to action in accordance with [G.S. 143-318.17](#).

Mr. Felton also stated that he would be keeping a record of time for each speaker and encouraged all community members to follow the proper chain of command when submitting grievances to the board. Mr. Felton then invited the following community members, in order in which they had previously signed up, to speak to the board: Rob Garretson, Linda White, Renee Nowell, Amanda Smith, Ashley Parker, Barbara Austin, Aaron Cawall and SRO Officer Jordan.

Four community members brought before the board their concerns for mandated masks in school stating the masks do not work or it should be the parents' choice. Two asked why parents were not given an opportunity to give their opinion before a decision was made to mandate masks for all. Ms. Barbara Austin spoke from the perspective of a school counselor and thanked the board members for their decision to have in person learning. She shared the benefits she has seen with the students back because "virtual learning is hurtful to kids." Ms. Renee Nowell and SRO Officer Jordan also thanked the board members for their decisions to keep students safe and in school. The final topic brought before the board was from Ms. Linda White. Mrs. White stated her concern that potential curriculum programs such as Critical Race Theory, although not currently taught in Gates County Schools, could be "detrimental" and asked that a focus on racial issues be taught in a "positive way."

Mr. Felton thanked each community member for their time and introduced Dr. Williams for his superintendent report.

SUPERINTENDENT UPDATE

Opening of School

I am happy to say that we are in our second week of in-person, traditional school and it is so good to see all of our students in the schools, teachers in their classrooms, buses with students riding to and from school, and parents dropping off and picking students.

Health and Safety Measures

Gates County Schools is performing diagnostic COVID testing at the school level during the 2021-2022 school year.

- All testing is optional and requires parent consent for students under 18.
- Testing is also available to staff members when requested.
- This testing will only be diagnostic testing meaning only when individuals are showing symptoms.

COVID-19 Information from NCDHHS

According to Dr. Betsey Tilson, State Health Director & Chief Medical Officer of NCDHHS, the latest information indicates that COVID-19 data numbers in North Carolina continue to rise in all four categories:

1. Number of Daily Cases of COVID-19
2. Number of Positive Tests
3. Daily Number of People Hospitalized
4. Percentage of ED visits for COVID-like illness this season compared to previous seasons.

Mandatory Masks in Schools

With the opening of schools, 4 school districts in the Northeast had optional face masks while the other school districts had mandatory face masks. After the first week of school, all 4 districts who had optional face masks have now changed to mandatory face masks for students and staff. In North Carolina, 45 school districts changed from optional to mandatory face masks after the first week of school.

New Legislation

On Monday, August 30, 2021, Governor Cooper signed into law SB 654. The new law gives school districts:

1. The authority to make day-to-day decisions on shifting individual schools or classrooms to remote instruction because of COVID-19 exposures that require quarantines or creates staffing shortages. It also states schools need to return to in-person instruction as soon as staff is available or quarantine is over.
2. Requires public school boards to vote at least once a month on whether their face mask policies should be modified.

Health Professionals on Masks in School

CDC: Due to the circulating and highly contagious Delta variant, CDC recommends universal indoor masking by all students (age 2 and older), staff, teachers, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status.

AAP: The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) strongly endorses the use of safe and effective infection control procedures to protect children and adolescents. Consistent use of a face mask is one part of a comprehensive strategy (in addition to vaccination, physical distancing, and hand washing) to mitigate risk and help reduce the spread of COVID-19, particularly in those who are not fully vaccinated or not eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.

NCDHHS: Following the July 27 guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

(CDC), all unvaccinated individuals should wear a face covering in all indoor public settings. Fully vaccinated individuals should wear a face covering in all indoor public spaces if you live in a county of high or substantial levels of transmission as defined by the CDC, until more people are vaccinated and viral transmission decreases. Everyone, including people who are fully vaccinated, should wear a face covering in all K-12 schools, child care, indoor settings with a large number of children or child-focused activities (e.g., children's museums), public transportation, health care settings, high density congregate settings (e.g., correction and detention facilities, homeless shelters, migrant farm camps), and large crowded indoor venues (e.g., arenas, stadiums).

Board Report

Ms. Boone, Ms. Heimbecker and Ms. Ryan all thanked those in attendance for their interest in the schools. Ms. Ryan asked that the same energy that had been given in the speeches be used for continued support of the schools, administrators, teachers and students. "We want our kids in school. It's a joint effort."

Mr. Felton gave a PowerPoint presentation in regards to school lunches. He said he had heard numerous complaints as to the quality of what was being offered so he wanted to see for himself. Each school's menu for his visit was given as well as both a praise and a suggestion for each site. Overall he said the serving sizes were appropriate and well presented but there is still work to be done.

In addition Mr. Felton reported that he, Dr. Williams and Ms. Ryan went to Perquimans County Schools for a comparison between the two district's lunch offerings. They found there are common problems with both districts. Mr. Felton concluded a variety in menu choices and a change in those options could make a difference in the perception of school lunches. He plans to visit the schools again within the next month, unannounced, to give the staff an opportunity to have more training and a chance to "show off their abilities."

Out of District Requests

Dr. Williams tentatively approved the following out of district requests:

- Zariyh Baker tentatively approved out of district for Gatesville Elementary School
- Alexandria Boyce tentatively approved out of district for Buckland Elementary School
- Benjamin and Skyla Collier tentatively approved out of district for Buckland Elementary School
- Ryan Fedock tentatively approved out of district for Gates County High School with tuition required
- Rocklin and Finley Glavin tentatively approved for Buckland Elementary School
- Jamare Holley tentatively approved for Buckland Elementary School
- John R Howard tentatively approved for Gates County High School

- Thomas McCormick tentatively approved for Gatesville Elementary School with tuition required
- Conner Rhodes tentatively approved for Gates County High School with tuition required
- Derrion and Darrian Riddick tentatively approved for Buckland Elementary School
- Chloe Sackett tentatively approved for Gatesville Elementary School
- Audrey Small tentatively approved for Buckland Elementary with tuition waived
- Makayla Smith tentatively approved for Gates County High School with tuition required
- Sarah Smith tentatively approved for Gates County High School
- Lindsay Williams tentatively approved for Gates County High School with tuition required
- Laney Stallings tentatively approved for Buckland Elementary School with tuition required
- Owen Stallings tentatively approved for Gates County High School with tuition required

Out of District Transfers

Dr. Williams tentatively approved the following for release from Gates County Schools:

- Brooke Pierce released from Gates County Schools to attend Chowan County Schools
- Annabelle Stallings released from Gates County Schools to attend Perquimans County Schools

New Business

The next board meeting date was set for October 11 at Central Middle School.

Ms. Boone made the motion to nominate Mr. Byrum as the district's representative for the NCSBA Board of Directors. A vote was taken and all board members present agreed in a unanimous decision.

Ms. Boone made the motion to approve items one through fifteen of the closed session agenda. Ms. Heimbecker seconded the motion. Mr. Felton called for a vote. The motion was passed unanimously.

Ms. Ryan made the motion to approve items one through six on the consent agenda. Ms. Heimbecker seconded the motion. Mr. Felton called for a vote and each board member stated their vote. The consent agenda was passed unanimously.

With there being no further business, Ms. Boone made the motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Ryan seconded the motion. Mr. Felton called for a vote. The motion was carried and the meeting adjourned at 7:08 p.m.

Board Secretary

Chairman of the Board

