

Gates County Board of Education Meeting
Regular Session
January 10, 2022

The Gates County Board of Education met for its regular session on January 10, 2022 at Gatesville Elementary. In attendance were Superintendent Dr. Williams, Assistant Superintendent Dr. Tammy Boone, Board Chairman Ray Felton, Vice Chairman Mrs. Sallie Ryan, Board Members Mrs. Glendale Boone, Mr. Leslie Byrum and Ms. Amanda Heimbecker. Also in attendance were Human Resources Director Ms. Chante Jordan and board clerk Mrs. Jacqueline Davenport.

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Felton at 6:04 p.m.

Ms. Glendale Boone made the motion to approve the business agenda. Mr. Byrum seconded the motion. Mr. Felton called for a vote. Each member stated their vote and the motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Michael Sheline and Ms. Amanda Smith signed up for the public comments prior to the meeting. Both expressed their concerns over the continued mask mandate and asked the board to consider making masks optional for all.

Two other community members requested to speak, but were denied because they failed to sign-in prior to the meeting.

For his superintendent's report, Dr. Williams introduced Mr. Jeremy Wright, Director of Student Services, to give an update to the board concerning current local COVID information. Mr. Wright informed the board the NC Toolkit was revised on December 30, 2021 and January 6, 2022. Gates County Schools is still continuing to test staff and students (following parental consent) for COVID, however, testing supplies are running low. More test kits are expected to arrive soon. The test kit shortage has made it difficult in locating testing sites outside of the school district. Testing results have also been delayed due to the increase of exposures.

Currently, according to Mr. Wright, per the CDC guidelines, Gates County is now in the Red Category, meaning transmission of the virus is high. Mr. Wright did say the number of cases reported by the current health department may or may not include cases within the schools because of how the test results are reported. Mr. Wright stated as of January 10, 2022, Gates County Schools had the following breakdown in cases:

- ❖ T. S. Cooper: 3 active cases, 16 in quarantine
- ❖ Gatesville Elementary: 8 active cases, 11 in quarantine
- ❖ Buckland Elementary: 1 active case, 8 in quarantine
- ❖ Central Middle: 2 active cases, 18 in quarantine
- ❖ Gates County High School: 8 active cases, 21 in quarantine
- ❖ Staff: 3 active cases, 4 in quarantine

Mr. Wright stressed he believed the numbers were higher than what he had given since the suspected cases had been rising throughout the day. Gates County Community Center, for instance, would need to be closed for several days due to the lack of staff that would be out. The Pre-K program at Gatesville Elementary also was closed for the same reason.

The CDC has recently updated its guidelines for quarantine depending on vaccination status and other variables. The NC Toolkit still recommends schools continue with mandatory masks. Ms. Ryan asked if the Test to Stay was still an option. Mr. Wright responded that the option is still available as long as masks are worn by all.

Dr. Williams recommended the following students for out of district enrollment pending payment of tuition:

- Ava Nowell
- Addison Nowell
- Natalie Nowell

Board members offered a brief synopsis of things they have been doing since the last meeting. Ms. Ryan has participated in the Race and Equity committee. They are currently working on updating the dress code and discussing the inclusion of the number of students of color in advanced classes, as well as updating their mission statement.

Mr. Byrum stated he was thankful schools were still in session with in-person learning despite the number of cases and thanked the community members in attendance for being advocates for their children.

Ms. Boone wished everyone a Happy New Year and thanked community members for attending. She wanted to remind everyone that there are rules the board must follow and the board does hear their concerns.

Mr. Felton recognized and thanked Dr. Boone for her willingness to step into the interim principal position at TS Cooper Elementary while also continuing to serve as the district's assistant superintendent.

Ms. Pittman offered the financial budget report to the board. Budget figures appear to be on target through December and payments of out of district tuition are current. Ms. Pittman shared that Ms. Critcher, New Beginnings Daycare Director, has provided new information concerning the daycare's budget based on the updated enrollment costs and salary increases. The grant that was recently received is helping to offset the required salary increases.

Ms. Boone made the motion to approve the consent agenda. Ms. Heimbecker seconded the motion. Mr. Felton called for a vote. Each board member stated their vote and the motion was approved unanimously.

Ms. Boone made a motion to continue the current mask mandate for all students. Ms. Sallie Ryan seconded the motion. Mr. Felton called for a vote. Each board member stated their vote. Ms. Boone and Ms. Ryan said yes. Mr. Byrum and Ms. Heimbecker said no. Mr. Felton cast the deciding vote by voting yes. The motion carried in favor of keeping the current mask mandate in a 3 to 2 vote.

Mr. Byrum stated he believes the peak of the Omicron variant has or will soon reach its peak. He requested the board meet again to discuss making masks optional. After discussion, it was determined that the board would meet again on January 20, 2022 for a special called session to include the criteria of when masks could be made optional.

Each board member was assigned a school for the second semester of the 2021-2022 school year. The following the schools were adopted:

Mr. Felton - Buckland Elementary
 Ms. Ryan - Central Middle School
 Ms. Boone - TS Cooper Elementary
 Mr. Byrum - Gatesville Elementary
 Ms. Heimbecker - Gates County High School

The next scheduled board meeting will be February 7, 2022 at 4 p.m. at Buckland Elementary.

Ms. Boone made the motion to approve the closed session actions. Mr. Byrum seconded the motion. Mr. Felton called for a vote. Each member stated their vote and the motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Boone made a motion to approve the regular session actions and adjourn the meeting. Mr. Byrum seconded the motion. Mr. Felton called for a vote. Each member stated their vote and the motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Board Secretary

Chairman of the Board