



GLOUCESTER COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Teacher Advisory Committee Minutes
December 6, 2021 – 4:30 p.m.

Dr. Clemons welcomed everyone, expressing his appreciation for each and hoping everyone had a relaxing Thanksgiving holiday.

Items from TAC members

Dr. Clemons indicated some of the larger issues submitted by members would be discussed today. If members feel other smaller items need to be addressed following the meeting, please send an email indicating those issues. Moving forward, a folder will be shared in Google Docs for members to place concerns prior to the meetings each month and receive feedback.

Members shared some news, including Melanie Johnson (Botetourt) who recently traveled to Santa Fe, New Mexico and saw a lot of history that we don't normally learn about. Casey Perry (Peasley) indicated the Peasley SCA raised \$1,100 for Shop with a Cop. Kim Denham (Page) saw the USS Wisconsin recently and encouraged others to plan a visit. Flora Brunjes (Bethel) indicated Bethel had collected over 6,000 canned goods for the Bread for Life pantry. Kudos!

Dr. Chuck Wagner (Assistant Superintendent of Instruction) provided a technology update. The technology department is currently in the process of providing new equipment for substitute teachers which should help alleviate concerns schools have been experiencing. Some new technology platforms, such as Freckle have been having issues. Dr. Wagner indicated this may be due in part to some teachers having two logins. Power School and ClassLink as well as other programs, could also be an issue. A meeting is planned next week to try to improve these issues; however, some things occurring need to be resolved outside of the division. Dr. Wagner also indicated plans are being discussed for teacher training on some of the programs and is hopeful the issues will improve.

Mrs. Rachel Blankenship (Executive Director of Human Resources and Compliance) provided an update on substitutes and counselor support. Two permanent substitutes have been hired for GHS and one at each of the middle schools. Mrs. Blankenship indicated this should help to have more substitutes available for the elementary schools and others are being hired weekly. In addition, paraprofessionals should not be needed as often to cover classes. A counselor position is currently being advertised and GCPS is also looking for interns for placement next semester. Mrs. Brunjes (Bethel) indicated that there is a substitute who works in their building every day with no benefits. It would be helpful if permanent substitutes were also being hired at that level. Mrs. Blankenship indicated there are currently no plans to hire permanent substitutes at the elementary level; however, many substitutes have been hired into paraprofessional positions as they become available. Substitutes in long-term positions receive a higher compensation than paraprofessional positions, but not the benefits of full-time employees. Dr. Clemons indicated follow-up discussion may be needed for those unique circumstances.

Mrs. Heather Lucas (Chief Financial Officer) explained health insurance deductibles in response to a concern about the cost of deductibles. Mrs. Lucas indicated plans have been about the same for the past few years, only the vendor changed this year. The new vendor, Anthem, offers more discounts, which employees should be seeing. Overall, costs are kept down because GCPS bids out every few years. When the full cost of the health insurance plan is considered, GCPS pays much more for the employer share than some other divisions. The high deductible health savings plan (HSA) is a maximum out of pocket of \$2,800 for an individual, but GCPS pays \$1,200 each year into the HSA

accounts of employees who elect that option. It is important for employees to understand their plan and the benefits offered.

Mr. Bryan Hartley (Executive Director of Operations) – Mrs. Lucas provided an update on behalf of Mr. Hartley, indicating some filtered water fountains are still in the process of being retrofitted due to the availability of supplies. Mrs. Lucas also addressed concerns from GHS regarding the teachers' bathroom on "D Hall" and the lack of heat on "D Hall" in general, indicating the sink in the teachers' restroom was fixed and the lights in the restroom are also being repaired. A work order had not previously been submitted for those issues; however, they were addressed as soon as that occurred. The heat on "D Hall" has two broken units, one was repaired on 12/1 and the other is awaiting a part. Mrs. Lucas addressed concerns shared from Page M.S. regarding setbacks for HVAC, indicating staff does attempt to adjust those accordingly when custodians are in the building. In the summer, sections of the building are controlled where custodians will be working. If a custodial team is having issues with extreme heat/cold, please contact Dave Miller, Facilities Manager.

Megan Harris (Peasley) inquired about a group rate with other divisions for health insurance. Mrs. Lucas indicated such a plan was proposed by the state a few years ago, but there was not enough interest from divisions.

Dr. Clemons mentioned the state health order mandating masks and what may be coming. Conversations occurring indicate that Governor Youngkin will not have a public health order related to mandating mask wearing. If that is the case, school divisions will still have the flexibility to require them. Dr. Clemons doesn't know what direction the GCPs School Board will decide to go at this time, but wants to keep people safe to the greatest extent possible.

Lisa Jones (Director of Nursing) provided updates regarding vaccinations and testing, indicating the need to continue the process of contact tracing. If this is not done, our close contact and quarantine numbers could increase. Mrs. Jones indicated schools in Virginia Beach are changing mask requirements and will be one to watch. The turnout last week for student vaccines was great and a second opportunity will be coming. Tests are also now able to be administered at home, if desired. Mrs. Jones indicated numbers spiked after Halloween and it is likely to happen again two weeks after Thanksgiving and again after winter break. Omicron doesn't seem to be as severe as the other variants. Schools should continue using petitions, hand sanitizers, washing hands, and staying home when sick.

Dr. Clemons said elementary schools had concerns regarding early dismissal days that were not included in the calendar. The School Board has approved adding those days back in the calendar, as well as some early dismissal days for secondary schools. In total, the current calendar now has nine early dismissal days for elementary, counting the one that was given for high tide and four early dismissal days for secondary. Dr. Clemons addressed questions about staff leaving early on those days, by saying the need for those days was expressed for planning and it would be most effective to remain in school for that purpose. Election day was a work from home day and the Wednesday prior to Thanksgiving was given as a day off for everyone. Dr. Clemons indicated he does take into consideration what other divisions may do, but that does not mean Gloucester will do the exact thing. The whole week of Thanksgiving was requested by some staff members and that isn't as sustainable as the early dismissal days throughout the year. In addition, those schools who received that week off, may not have had Veteran's day off or other days that we receive, and may be required to make up time if days or clock hours are needed. Dr. Clemons also said the transition to five days per week should have somewhat easier for Gloucester because of being in school four days per week for the last quarter of 2020-21. Returning to a full sense of normalcy will take time, but Dr. Clemons and the School Board try to find a balance with teachers and the need to have students in school. In addition, the early release days have been added in the calendar at times that might be most needed. Dr. Wagner indicated colleagues in Region III have been asking how others were accommodating for the days given and that some will have to adjust their start/stop times to meet the days/clock hours requirement.

Dr. Clemons discussed the changes that have occurred in the school calendar and that when GCPS was last on a 180 day calendar in 2009-10. That calendar and the current 180 day calendar for elementary only have a five minute time difference. As we move forward, adjustments may be made in the next school year. In addition, Dr. Clemons plans to keep as many of the early dismissals as possible. Secondary schools do have an increase of 15 (middle) and 20 (high) minutes, but those are due to the change to the 4 x 4 schedule. Transportation also has to be considered whenever time changes might occur. Dr. Clemons indicated it is critical for students to be in school and schools need to address the learning loss that has occurred. Schools will be accountable on state assessments this year, with no waivers being given. Dr. Clemons hopes to keep the tradition of excellence Gloucester County has worked for, even moving forward in a pandemic. We are seeing the impact of social/emotional and learning loss of students being out of school and understands the need to find a healthy balance.

Mrs. Harris (Peasley) expressed concerns about the 83 minute blocks following EIB students having already been in that class for 40 minutes. Last year, 60 minute blocks were held for science/history and it would be great to have those again sometime in the future. Dr. Clemons indicated it would be necessary to determine where we are academically and also to consider transportation in any schedule adjustments. Mrs. Harris indicated she would like to see shorter blocks within the school day, not a shorter day as a whole. Dr. Wagner indicated teachers may be teaching different classes if the middle school were to return to a straight six calendar. In addition, there are currently 20 staff positions that are not sustainable.

Melanie Johnson (Botetourt) clarified that tightening up the twenty minutes is her biggest concern. It is instructional time that we don't get credit for. Some buses arrive at 8:40 and others not until 9:00 and the late arrivals are missing the benefit. If the schedule were tightened to 8:50 – 9:00, it would be better and make that time more efficient. Dr. Clemons will discuss this with the Executive Leadership Team.

Adjournment – 6:00 p.m.

- Next Meeting – January 31, 2022 (Location - TBD)