



GLOUCESTER COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Teacher Advisory/GEA Committee

Electronic Zoom Meeting

October 25, 2021 – 4:30 p.m.

Dr. Clemons welcomed teachers and Executive Leadership Team members and thanked teachers for submitting items early for the meeting.

Items from TAC Members

Dr. Clemons indicated that he and members of the Executive Leadership Team have reviewed the items submitted by members, and recurring themes from all schools included the need for more planning time and the difficulty in meeting all of the current demands. The leadership team is reviewing the calendar for possible early closings, professional days or work from home days. At the last meeting, the elementary teachers brought up the loss of the early closing days that were included in our calendar in previous years. The day of the Homecoming parade (October 7) was an early dismissal day for elementary and January 24 and March 31 have now been added (school board approved) as elementary early dismissal days. Any other potential calendar adjustments would also require School Board approval. Dr. Clemons and the Executive Leadership Team will continue to review the calendar, adding that items brought up in these meetings are taken seriously and efforts are made to address such items to the greatest extent possible.

In regards to a concern about lesson plans and feedback time, Dr. Clemons suggested discussion be held with building level administrators as this is not an item directed by the leadership team regarding specific times and dates. Dr. Clemons will share with administrators that there was a concern about this topic, but any items that are building level issues should be discussed with the building administrators. However, if an operational procedure at the building level continues to be a concern after being addressed at the building level, then the leadership team could take a look at it.

Concerns were expressed regarding inconsistencies in physical distancing for staff and students. Dr. Clemons indicated that small group instruction needs to be looked at differently now than in the past as the VDH guidelines only provide a quarantine exception for students, but not staff. These guidelines as well as other mitigation strategies need to be followed carefully to ensure all is being done to keep students and staff safe to the greatest extent possible.

Setting employee and academic goals was also a concern. Dr. Clemons indicated that setting goals is a part of what we do as we always strive for continuous growth and improvement. In addition, the Standards of Learning Assessments will count this year and “Accreditation” is not being waived this year as it has been over the previous two years. Furthermore, there is a new fall growth assessment that Virginia is requiring along with the already existing Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program (VKRP) and other assessments. Dr. Wagner added that the new fall growth assessment was implemented for this year and next year, and a fall and winter assessment for grades 3-8 in reading and math will occur next year. These assessments

require similar test administration protocols to SOL testing, but are not as extensive. Dr. Wagner believes these are being required to help schools maintain or improve in regards to student growth. Melanie Johnson (Botetourt) had a related concern about a program taking up a lot of time and needs to be done on Chromebooks that third grade students do not normally use. Teachers are stressed and weren't prepared for the amount of time testing would require or the instructional time taken to do so. In future years, Mrs. Johnson suggested more time for preparation is needed. Christy Phillips (Achilles) said there isn't a computer resource time to train students on Chromebooks and the Chromebooks have to be borrowed from another classroom for testing that is spread out over three weeks. These tests provide valuable information, but take a lot of time.

Paraprofessionals being asked to substitute was also a concern, as well as teachers being pulled during planning periods to cover classes. Rachel Blankenship, Executive Director of Human Resources & Compliance, said new substitute recruiting is going well, with most substitutes filling teaching vacancies before paraprofessional vacancies due to the pay rate. On an average thirty-five substitutes are in place each day, but not all are able to work every day. There is an 80-90% fill rate on most days. Dr. Clemons said if someone is being used to cover a class, it is because there are no other staff available, which is why compensation was added for those occurrences. Another question was if someone could refuse to cover a class. Dr. Clemons indicated that it is the expectation that staff comply with reasonable requests made by their building level administration. If someone thinks a request is unfair, he/she would be advised to speak to the building level administration and then if not resolved, to Mrs. Blankenship. Megan Harris (Peasley) indicated the first "go to" at Peasley is the new librarian tech and the assistant in the library, if a position can't be filled. When it's occasional, it isn't a big deal, but is concerning if it happens on a regular basis. Mrs. Blankenship indicated ten positions were filled at GHS today (October 25) and one at Peasley, adding that last minute jobs have a tendency to not be picked up in many cases. If you know you will be out, enter it as soon as possible. Dr. Clemons added that bus driver shortages are also problematic for GCPS at the moment.

Lisa Jones (Division Nurse Coordinator) addressed COVID testing questions, indicating the ViSSTA program is a testing possibility for GCPS and the logistics are being reviewed. Employees could also be tested. Another testing option could be diagnostic testing at home. Mrs. Johnson (Botetourt) said she has sinus issues and can't be out of work every time symptoms of a sinus issue occur. Kimberly Denham (Page) indicated staff feel self-screening at home is preferred and would be one less thing to do when arriving to work, and if parents are trusted to self-screen students, the hired professionals should be as well. Mrs. Jones indicated there are several new employees and feels the process is good, but the subject is up for conversation. Dr. Clemons said the Executive Leadership Team will review this protocol and follow up with staff as soon as possible. In addition, Mrs. Jones is hopeful more employees will take advantage of the vaccination clinic coming up during the week of October 25. Nurses are busy with contact tracing this year, so may not have time to do daily checks on the employee screening as was done last year, but Mrs. Jones asks that people do the right thing.

Conflicting meetings in buildings or frequency of meetings in buildings was presented as a concern. Dr. Clemons indicated if there are too many meetings at the building level, have dialogue with the building administrators. If the issue remains, then a conversation may be needed at the district level.

Dr. Wagner asked Tricia Dowdy (GHS) to clarify the capability of the Follett library management system. Mrs. Dowdy said the program holds up to 5,000 resources available in our schools. GHS alone has over 19,000 books in the media center. Any inquiries regarding books in our system, should be redirected to the Media Specialists. Dr. Wagner also suggested additional clarifying language could be added to the resource page. Dr. Clemons reminded members that while it is not required for teacher lesson plans to be posted on the division website, FOIA requests could be made to see lesson plans, teacher notes and staff email correspondence.

Mrs. Harris inquired about additional water filling stations at Peasley M.S. Mr. Brian Hartley, Executive Director of Operations, indicated that more water filling stations are being installed in buildings, however; some will require being retrofitted. The goal is to have a minimum of two in each building and then possibly a third in the larger buildings.

Dr. Clemons requested anyone with specific technology questions to please send those to our office and the appropriate person will be contacted to respond to those as well as the question regarding printers.

In regards to a question about compensation, Dr. Clemons said teachers received an average of over 5% this year and that compensation is always a priority. Adjustments were also just made to the bus drivers' compensation. Support staff compensation will be reviewed carefully in the upcoming budget as well as teacher compensation. The administration is always looking to support staff from a compensation perspective.

ELT Updates

Dr. Clemons informed members of an important School Board work session added to the schedule on Wednesday, October 27. The topic is "Practical & Operational Implications" regarding decisions of the U.S Court of Appeals & the U.S Supreme Court as they pertain to the Grimm vs. Gloucester County School Board case; and 22.1-23.3 of the Code of Virginia. Dr. Clemons indicated that public perception is not even close to the facts and it is important that accurate information is articulated.

Elections will be held on November 2nd and this will be one of the biggest we've had locally in a number of years. Dr. Clemons encouraged members to look at the messages articulated by each candidate closely as political messaging is unfortunately becoming a part of the process.

Mr. Hartley indicated plans are moving forward with the new transportation facility. Dr. Clemons added this a huge "win-win" for both the schools and the county.

Adjournment 6:07 p.m.

- Next Meeting – December 6, 2021 (Location - TBD)