



GLOUCESTER COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**Teacher Advisory/GEA Committee**

Electronic Zoom Meeting (Minutes)

September 20, 2021 – 4:30 p.m.

Dr. Clemons welcomed everyone, thanking them for serving on the committee and for all they are doing during this difficult time.

1. Items from TAC members

Dr. Clemons indicated the meeting format has changed this year to allow members an opportunity to provide input from their buildings at the beginning of each meeting. In addition, members were encouraged to share information at a later time if anything comes up that was not available at the time of the meeting.

Abingdon – Lisa Sheesley had no items to share from Abingdon E.S.

Achilles – Christen Phillips/Sara Radden shared several concerns from Achilles, including the lack of planning time for elementary school teachers who are spending an enormous amount of time outside of contracted hours to get everything done. Buses are letting students off earlier, which is taking away what little time teachers had prior to the beginning of the day. Teachers are getting burnt out, with no time in the day to get lessons done. In addition, Canvas wasn't even available until school started. Melanie Johnson (Botetourt) added that this topic is also on her list from Botetourt E.S. There isn't any time between after all students leave and when staff leaves anymore because buses are later picking up all students. Although, Mrs. Johnson did indicate she has seen improvement with afternoon bus pickup times. Dr. Clemons said the bus situation is difficult. Currently, there is a national shortage of drivers and it is impacting pickup and drop-off times. GCPS has been operating with a reduced number of drivers since school started and routes have even been re-routed since that time. Rachel Blankenship, Executive Director of Human Resources and Compliance, added that on the first day of school, we were down by one bus driver. However, with additional vacancies and medical issues, we are now down about twelve drivers. It takes about two weeks to train and qualify drivers for their CDL. Until we can get those routes back as they should be, giving back will be difficult at the present moment.

Elementary staff have questioned why there are no longer elementary early release days, which provided staff much needed work time. Mr. Hartley said those days are now full professional days across the division between every quarter and should be more impactful than the two-hour early release days. Mrs. Johnson stated the point of those days was to make it more equitable and now middle and high have been given more time and elementary is falling further behind. Students are currently in the classroom from ~~8:50-3:50~~ 8:40 – 3:50 (or later), but it doesn't all count toward clock time, even though teachers are teaching. Mrs. Johnson also asked about discussion held last year regarding elementary students possibly coming in a little later in the mornings. Dr. Clemons indicated those are possibilities that could be looked into, but would require consideration of the bus schedules to determine if adjustments could be made. The 180-day schedule does allow for some flexibility.

Mrs. Phillips added that with the shortage of substitutes, para-pros are covering classroom teachers for several days at a time and if a compensation increase could be given to match the substitute rate. Mrs. Blankenship noted an increase of \$3 per hour was approved last year and has increased to \$5 this year.

Mrs. Phillips also inquired about the kindergarten tables and Plexiglas dividers that were ordered. Mrs. Blankenship indicated the dividers are in and as soon as tables arrive, will be installed in classrooms. Dr. Wagner, Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services, will obtain an update on the expected delivery date for the tables.

Another concern from Achilles was regarding the student to counselor ratio. Mrs. Phillips indicated there are unique behaviors this year and one counselor and part-time psychologist are not enough to meet the needs. Flora Brunjes (Bethel E.S.) added that Bethel is also experiencing similar behavior issues. Training on de-escalation techniques and how to handle these behaviors was discussed. Crisis Prevention training through CPI is not just about restraint, a lot of de-escalation techniques for during and before behavior starts to escalate are provided. Achilles has staff members trained who might be able to help other staff. Shana Wafer, GCPS Behavior Specialist is available to assist and has been to Achilles to help with the situation occurring there. Please let your administrators know if Ms. Wafer could assist anyone at your building.

Dr. Clemons mentioned student enrollment numbers in regards to class sizes. Redistricting has created a much better balance, but in some instances, there may be a need to look at numbers school by school. Dr. Wagner added that the Sept. 30 count will give a better idea if redistributing staff is needed, as well as the cost benefit.

Bethel – Ms. Brunjes indicated that on the first day of running club at Bethel, 64 students ran 118 miles before school. Go Bears!

Botetourt – Thank you for rezoning! Staff are grateful for the intervention support! Botetourt is fortunate to have a wonderful administrator who steps in for anything and everything! Mrs. Johnson added that when shorthanded with custodians, Mrs. Hudgins was cleaning the front hall because no one was there to do it. Mrs. Hudgins goes above and beyond!

Mrs. Johnson shared difficulties occurring since desktops were removed from classrooms. Substitutes need laptops, not Thinkpads, in order to access lesson plans on the screen and to use the equipment to project on the screen. Another issue involves the port/docking station, not having enough ports to connect everything needed. Mrs. Johnson has seven devices to connect daily and also needs the substitute to have the same access. Mrs. Radden indicated a long-term substitute would soon be covering her class and also has a ThinkPad. Tricia Dowdy, ITRT/Webmaster/Gradebook Manager, indicated the I.T. department is working to update the equipment available for substitutes and that at the current time, it is difficult to obtain new equipment.

Mrs. Johnson also expressed difficulties with accounts because of her name change and expects others in this situation might also experience issues.

Petsworth – Carla Williams / Alyssa Thomas – Mrs. Williams indicated Safe Schools was not available to staff prior to the beginning of this school year. It would be helpful to have access during the summer.

Page – Sharon Bantel/Kim Denham – Ms. Bantel said a lot of students are missing time from school and teachers are required to have work on Canvas without any extra time to prepare. In addition, it is very hard to follow-up with these students. The new computers do not provide for access to DVD players, which has been an issue for some. Others are experiencing anxiety over new expectations with the laptop. Lisa Parzanese, ITRT at Page is on maternity leave, and even though Mrs. Dowdy is available to assist at Page, it is not the same as having someone onsite. Ms. Denham did not have any other issues from Page, but reiterated the need for a tech person.

Peasley – Megan Harris inquired about teacher bonuses for perfect attendance. Dr. Clemons indicated if that were to be considered, it would need to be near the end of the school year due to the many things currently occurring. Salary increases are given when possible and were provided in the current year's budget. This also benefits an employee's VRS compensation. Advanced degrees are also compensated for and a \$900 bonus was provided to all full-time staff last year and a reduced bonus to part-time staff. Due to the quarantine situations, bonuses that were previously offered for perfect attendance to cafeteria and bus drivers have also not been offered at this time.

Mrs. Harris asked if inclement weather days would be virtual learning days. Dr. Clemons indicated some regulations now give school divisions the ability to make up some days if classified as remote learning days.

Another question from Peasley M.S. pertained to the GHS yearbook delivery date, which Mrs. Dowdy indicated yearbooks are being delivered this month.

Mrs. Harris said substitutes have been an issue at Peasley and several staff members have already been asked to cover. Mrs. Blankenship said substitutes make the selection/s of where they would like to substitute upon hire. Some are available for all buildings while others specify particular sites. Thirteen subs were approved on the last personnel agenda, six applied today (09/20/2021) and eight last week. Mrs. Blankenship added that today (09/20/2021), no school had more than one position to cover internally. Mrs. Harris asked if the additional pay teachers received for covering classes is still available. Mrs. Blankenship indicated it is available and has doubled from \$15 to \$30 per hour. Concerns were also expressed over any violations that may be occurring when a special education para professional or teacher is being used to cover if the regular classroom teacher is out, which prevents them from going to some co-taught classes. Ms. Denham said her understanding is that if they start to be pulled enough that service hours are not being obtained, it would be a violation.

Peasley staff asked what the protocol is for quarantining/close contacts in regards to COVID and if it is consistent across the division. In addition, teachers are not aware of students being quarantined until they see it on the GCPS Dashboard. Lisa Jones, Nurse Coordinator, is creating a guidance document for staff. There will be times when students are quarantined due to contact outside of the school. In those instances, emails will be sent from the school nurse. Close contacts are consistent across the board. VDH has provided updated guidance school buses close contact definition. Mrs. Jones will also provide information to parents and the GCPS Dashboard is updated most evenings. Regarding what constitutes an outbreak, Mrs. Jones indicated two or more cases in an area are considered an outbreak.

Mrs. Jones is looking into VISSTA, a state COVID testing program, as well as other tests available. Mrs. Harris inquired about at home type tests and if any could be kept on hand in buildings for teachers who are told they are a close contact. Mrs. Jones indicated testing should not occur until 3-5 days after being a close contact, but she is looking at the availability of some types of testing

Mrs. Harris asked if masks could be provided, saying teachers were told to cut a small hole in torn masks to make another hole if students tear their masks. Some teachers are uncomfortable doing this. Mrs. Jones said more masks are expected.

Mrs. Harris asked if virtual classes were an option if buildings needed to be closed for a couple of weeks. Dr. Wagner said it is difficult to say at this point, but recognizes the need to be able to respond if that situation occurs. Senate Bill 1303 allows closure for a specific condition and then when remedied, in-person learning resumes. Mrs. Harris also asked if a virtual option could be possible to help with class sizes. Dr. Wagner indicated that Virtual Virginia is only

available to secondary students and enrollment has closed other than to students of military families transferring into the state. If GCPS were to have a separate virtual option, staffing would have to be considered, it would require School Board approval, and would be difficult to manage as schools are still required to be open for in person learning five days per week.

Mrs. Harris indicated that even though teachers are not teaching online and in person, they are expected to post assignments in Canvas and everything has to be created in Canvas, with all grading done in Canvas, which is very time consuming and causing confusion for students and teachers. In addition, Wednesdays are no longer available to catch up. Staff is also feeling overwhelmed with too many meetings. Many are on several committees and are being asked to collect a lot of data. Mrs. Harris indicated there are too many changes with the amount of work that is already being asked and not enough time to do everything. Everyone wants to do a great job, but teachers are so stressed out.

A Peasley teacher wants to know if she has to use her sick leave if her child is quarantined. She is socially distancing other than being at school. Dr. Wagner indicated the ELT will be looking at conditions (more than monthly). Dr. Clemons said sick leave is being used at this time, but we will be continuously looking at our processes as conditions are constantly evolving. Also, if a student is out several times, do we continue to post in canvas and the student continue to work virtually? Dr. Clemons said the administration is looking at that and wants to do what we can to support students to the greatest extent possible.

Dr. Wagner asked about the possibility of having a camera in classrooms where a student at home could watch teachers during a class period, and teachers not have to monitor a Zoom screen. Lisa Sheesley indicated this is done in her son's school division. Ms. Bantel felt it would be overwhelming and one more thing added. She also walks around the room. Mrs. Johnson is concerned about confidentiality and what families see about other children. Dr. Wagner said more conversation would need to occur if implemented. Ms. Bantel added that most of her online students were not successful last year, with only three out of twenty-one consistent and passing.

GHS – Tricia Dowdy indicated a lot of teachers are tired and overwhelmed, but Dr. Mygas has listened to concerns and answered many questions.

Dr. Clemons said many of the challenges still exist as we are still in the pandemic and will need to work through it.

Moving forward, members will be asked to email questions at least one week in advance in our efforts to help move the meetings along as efficiently as possible.

#### ELT Updates

Dr. Clemons likes having the Teacher Advisory items at the beginning of the meeting. We may not be able to solve all problems, but will do our best. Dr. Wagner thanked everyone for the open communication and wants them to know their concerns are taken seriously and also thanked them for filling this important role.

Adjournment 6:35 p.m.

Next Meeting – October 25, 2021 (Location - TBD)