



GLOUCESTER COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Teacher Advisory Committee

Electronic Zoom Meeting

March 22, 2021 – 4:30 p.m.

1. Welcome – Dr. Clemons welcomed everyone. Sharon Bantel (Page) expressed her appreciation to Dr. Clemons for speaking at the Black History Month event held at Page M.S.
2. FY'22 Budget – The General Assembly passed a 5% salary increase for employees, which would require a local match from the Board of Supervisors (BOS). The School Board has proposed a \$2.2 million increase in County funding over the current year, but the County Administrator has \$1.2 million increase in his proposed budget for the school division, which could allow for the local match for salaries. However, any less would impact it. This amount also would not allow for any proposed new positions with local funding. Typically, health insurance is also a big part of the budget, however; Dr. Clemons does not expect an increase for health insurance in the FY'22 budget.
3. Local Sales Tax Referendum – The County Administrator's proposed budget includes using the local sales tax option to fund debt service. Dr. Clemons does not support this proposed use. The intent of the additional sales tax was to provide another funding stream for major renovations or construction projects for schools and is what was advocated for at the General Assembly. This short sighted approach, if passed, will prevent much needed renovations to Gloucester High School. Senator Norment sent a letter to the Board of Supervisors, indicating this would not be looked upon favorably and may impact other localities attempting to have similar bills passed. Dr. Clemons said this is one of the most potentially impactful things he has seen in his career and stressed the importance of citizens uniting around this topic. Clint Alexander (GHS) asked about possible legal action. Dr. Clemons indicated Delegate Hodges is currently seeking the opinion of the Attorney General and that even if it is found to be legal, it is still in his estimation inappropriate. Dr. Clemons plans to attend the Board of Supervisors meeting on Wednesday, March 24, along with some members of the School Board and ELT.

In light of recent derogatory comments made at the School Board and Board of Supervisors meetings about teachers, Dr. Clemons assured members the School Board and Executive Leadership Team (ELT) know what teachers are doing and do not pay attention to negative comments made by people who do not realize what teachers are doing. Dr. Clemons, the School Board and ELT, appreciate and support our teachers.

4. ELT Updates

Instructional Department – Dr. Chuck Wagner, Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services, expressed his appreciation to teachers for all the hard work occurring this year. Summer positions have been posted and compensation increased to help attract interested teachers and paraprofessionals. Dr. Wagner hopes to see responses for those positions before spring break. Fall plans are also being discussed, as well as the possible addition of four instructional days next year for a total of 180 instructional days. Mr. Hartley is currently creating a potential calendar to reflect those days, with the two weeks off at Christmas and

three days at Thanksgiving. However, some holidays could be impacted with the extended year. The calendar will be discussed at the School Board meeting on April 13. Preparations are being made for the return (4 days per week) of hybrid students on April 19 and some students with disabilities returning on March 22. Staff is also looking to determine if a virtual option will be offered in the fall. If offered, there would be an application process and criteria to meet. Dr. Wagner indicated it may be necessary to pay for a service like Virtual VA so GCPS teachers will be able to focus on classroom instruction. Dr. Wagner also shared information regarding a mental health awareness training that will be required of staff, noting there is a prevalent need at the current time.

Dr. Clemons recognizes that our staff has different preferences regarding going to a four day in person schedule and respects everyone's opinion. However, returning four days each week now, will help GCPS to be ahead of the game in the fall. Senate Bill 1303 is currently on the Governor's desk and indicates a return to full in person learning for all students in the fall. Many things have already changed in the past month. Dr. Clemons also indicated the second group of GCPS staff to receive their COVID-19 shots, will be fully vaccinated before April 19.

Budget & Finance Department – Heather Lucas, Chief Financial Officer, indicated health insurance bids would be presented to the School Board at an upcoming school board monthly meeting. Dr. Clemons thanked Mrs. Lucas for all she does behind the scenes.

Human Resources Department – Rachel Blankenship, Executive Director of Human Resources & Compliance, has been busy helping prepare classrooms for the return of hybrid students on the four-day schedule. Furniture will need to be moved from some classrooms to allow for appropriate spacing. A moving company will be assisting with the move of those items to the Thomas Calhoun Walker Education Center. Items should be labeled and will be placed in sections. Broken items should be purged instead of moved and any items not needed, should not be labeled for return.

Operations Department – Bryan Hartley, Executive Director of Operations, is preparing two calendar options to present to the School Board. Both include holidays during the year that we currently recognize as well as work days between each quarter, professional days and an equity day. A post Labor Day start would have the school year ending on June 24 as Juneteenth is on a Sunday and would need to be recognized the following Monday). A pre Labor Day start would begin on August 30, with school closed the Friday and Monday prior to Labor day as required in the legislation allowing schools to open prior to Labor day. In that instance, the anticipated first day for new teachers would be Monday, August 16 and veteran teachers on August 18 or 19. Mrs. Bantel shared that West Point is returning students on August 23.

Redistricting of Elementary Schools – Dr. Clemons indicated a proposal was shared with the School Board to be considered for redistricting. The proposal would move students from Botetourt to Petsworth or Bethel and from Abingdon to Achilles. Moving these areas would also create cleaner lines on Route 17. One option presented would allow students in the 4th or 5th grade and any siblings to remain at their current school. Another option would allow only 5th graders and any siblings to remain and a third option would not allow for either. A public hearing regarding redistricting will be held at the April 13 School Board meeting. Melanie Glenn (Botetourt) thanked Dr. Clemons for making the proposal. Dr. Clemons encourages those who are in favor of the proposal to attend the School Board meeting on April 13.

5. Items from TAC members

Megan Harris (Peasley) asked if there are plans to hire fully virtual teachers when students return on April 19. Dr. Wagner indicated no changes would be made through the remainder of this year, but Virtual VA is being considered for the fall.

Mrs. Harris also asked if five days per week would be the expectation for next year. Dr. Clemons believes that five days per week will be the expectation in the fall. Mrs. Harris also shared concerns from staff at Peasley M.S. regarding cleaning protocols with more students in the classroom. Dr. Clemons indicated these concerns will be addressed by the appropriate staff. In addition, there were concerns regarding limitations on paper usage. Dr. Wagner believes staff should utilize digital assignments when possible, but recognizes some activities are most effective on paper.

Amber Giampa (Bethel) asked if spacing would be three or six feet in elementary classrooms. Dr. Clemons indicated each classroom would be spaced at the maximum amount possible and no less than three feet. Everything occurring now in classrooms will be beneficial this year and next year. Mrs. Giampa presented a question from a co-worker who would like to ask how best to respond to comments made by a Board of Supervisors (BOS) member regarding teachers not working as much this year. Teachers feel very disrespected by the comments. Dr. Wagner and Dr. Clemons suggested inviting the BOS member to visit a classroom to see exactly what is being done.

Discussion was also held regarding the fact that Wednesdays are not a day off. Any staff member who has not taken leave, is expected to be working. Reports of staff doing otherwise and some postings on social media, send a negative message.

Dr. Clemons expressed his appreciation to the Teacher Advisory members and hopes a decision will be made in the right direction regarding the sales tax funding. The Board of Supervisors typically passes the budget during the month of April.

Adjournment – 6:11 p.m.

Next Meeting – April 26, 2021 (Via Zoom)