

**BATTLE CREEK PUBLIC SCHOOLS BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**Special Meeting**  
**August 3, 2020**

**Meeting held electronically pursuant to Executive Order 2020-15**  
**Zoom identification number Meeting ID: 819 4581 6850**  
**5:30 p.m.**

**PRESENT – BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Karen Evans  
Catherine LaValley  
Kyra Wallace  
Patty Poole-Gray  
Charlie Fulbright  
Art McClenney  
Jackie Slaby

**Present – Administration**

Kim Carter – Superintendent  
Chandra Youngblood – Director, Elementary Education  
Anita Harvey - Director, District Transformation  
Deborah Nuzzi, Director, Secondary Education  
Monique Cheeks – Director, Student Services  
Laura Ash – Executive Director  
Jeff English – Executive Director  
Mitch Fowler – Director, School Data Systems & Innovations  
Nathan Hunt – Communications Manager  
Cheryl Johnson – Chief Executive Officer, Human Resources  
Wes Seeley – Coordinator of State/Federal Programs & Grants  
Charles Lipsey – Director, Facilities and Operations

**MINUTES**

The meeting was called to order by President Evans at 5:30 p.m. Karen Evans, Catherine LaValley, Kyra Wallace, Patty Poole-Gray, Charlie Fulbright, Art McClenney and Jackie Slaby were present.

## **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Motion by Vice President Catherine LaValley to approve the Agenda as written.

Trustee Charlie Fulbright supported the Motion.

A Roll Call Vote was taken.

**Motion passed 7 – 0**

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

President Karen Evans read the Public Comments aloud.

Deanna

57 Briarcliff Lane

Why is my son who is medically challenged required to go to regular ed class with no nurse in the classroom but my daughter who has no medical challenge allowed to stay home and do distance learning because of grade difference? I feel it should be the other way around.

Kaytee Faris

25 Fremont Street

My family is thrilled to hear about the new Virtual Academy. Specifically, we are excited that it will include individualized teaching options and supports that will help students to move at their own pace. I strongly urge the School Board to support this new Virtual Academy and look forward to learning more about it.

Dannielle

228 Riverside Drive

I cannot send my children to school knowing that this is still going around, plus they could get sick too and everyone else too.

ShiLaNiQua Taylor

39 East Baldwin Avenue

Please describe more in depth about the Virtual Learning. How is it going to work? What's the difference between remote and virtual? Why can't remote be offered as an option as well?

Josh Anderson

33 Maple Terrace, Battle Creek

With other schools now approving fully virtual Prek-12 around us like KPS and our neighbor school Lakeview, will the board see that it is not safe to have in-person learning at this time? Lakeview posted they had a conversation with the Calhoun County Public Health Department and they struggled to create a model that was optimal for safety and learning. How can this neighborhood school "struggle" and BCPS apparently didn't? It is the same Health Department. Offer child care for those who struggle like Lakeview did! Trust your teachers and staff for implementing online learning since they have been doing it since March and they know what to do and not to do.

Chris

100 West Van Buren

The Back-To-School Plan is one that leaves many questions to be answered. The teachers and the staff are the ones who see our kids, OUR KIDS, and we miss them terribly, but we want the safest return for them all. It would be in the best interest of the Board of Education to vote to amend the plan as presented to be remote learning for all K-12. It is best practice to incorporate teachers with the learning process and the Virtual Plan as outlined does not do this but once a week at best. For our youngest Bearcats, they need a teacher or staff member in their lives and it should be addressed in this Plan once we go to remote learning. Remote learning will be something we will need in the future and something we need for the first 9 weeks of the 2020-2021 school year. Thank you for your time.

Renay Ellison

7338 White Rabbit Rd, Battle Creek 49017

There should be an option for hybrid learning, for K-5. The classroom sizes should be limited. With the older kids doing virtual learning, why can't the class sizes be smaller? I dread sending my 1st grader to a class with 26 students. I support face-to-face learning, but with more safety measures. I also work full-time and would like to suggest virtual cafes, maybe held in unused cafeterias or gyms, for those kids that can't stay at home.

Israel Flores

76 Laurel Drive

Thank you to Superintendent Carter and the BCPS staff for quickly moving to address concerns raised at the last meeting to include the Latino and Burmese communities in your outreach efforts. I appreciate your leadership; your actions mattered.

Kate Flores

76 Laurel Drive

Thank you to Board Members, Superintendent Carter, and all the BCPS Team for your hard work, dedication, deep care and commitment to the children of this community. I appreciate and empathize deeply with the many challenges of this current moment and the many diverse needs of families. While the Plan is a good start, I don't believe either/or, all or nothing options are not sufficient to meet the needs of all students and families and ensure safety. In-person class sizes must be capped to small cohorts. With more creativity and flexibility, we should be able to have a both/and approach. For your consideration, I encourage you to consider an alternative model that would include:

- (1) hybrid/staggered in-person with small co-orts, led by teachers (eg. 2 days in-person, 3 days virtual);
- (2) "virtual cafes" available on "off days" for those needing extra support or child care, led by tutors and/or community partners;
- (3) 100% virtual/remote option for those who want it, and;
- (4) a limited, eligibility-only full-time in-person option for the most vulnerable kids or those with special needs.

Thank you for your consideration.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **BCPS Return to School Plan**

Superintendent Carter thanked President Karen Evans for the opportunity to present the BCPS Return to School Plan.

Superintendent Carter shared the following:

- All Districts are required to submit a Return to School Plan by August 15<sup>th</sup> that is Board approved and has been discussed with Shareholders and the Board.
- Thank you to the staff who provided time, worked on committees and adjusted based on the feedback received over the last several months.
- This has been a difficult process and, unfortunately, we are not able to honor the requests of all Shareholders. Decisions and plans made were based on Principals' feedback and the practice of what is best for the majority of our students.

Superintendent Carter advised the BCPS Return to School Plan as submitted is a plan that provides choice to families so they can decide what is best to meet their needs, meaning it is not an "either/or".

- It means if you feel your child is not ready to come back or you have safety concerns, you can enroll your child in the BCPS Virtual Academy. We have been talking with several different program providers to select the most robust plan and have landed the plane on one that will offer a variety of opportunities to students. We have also begun to explore socialization opportunities for the BCPS Virtual Academy.
- Additionally, we wanted to make sure those families who struggled with virtual/remote learning in the Spring, which we learned was not successful for many students, would have the choice to send their students to school in-person, full-time, 5 days a week.
- In Phases 1-3, it means the virus is significant and schools cannot open.
- While in Phase 4, schools have the option of opening. Calhoun County is currently in Phase 4.

Based on the choices offered and the information received, BCPS Administration is Recommending:

- Pre-K thru 5 will return to school, in-person 5 days a week.
- Grades 6-12 will engage in remote learning, with several live sessions with BCPS Teachers based on the student's course schedule.
- In Phase 5, BCPS will bring all students in schools K-12 back to school in-person, full-time, 5 days a week.

Superintendent Carter discussed there have been many questions about why BCPS isn't following the same protocols as other Districts. She noted it is important to understand that all Districts are differently resourced. As a result of our being able to provide safety measures in collaboration with the Calhoun County Health Department, we can mitigate the spread to bring our students back. Much of the recommended BCPS Return to School Plan is based on a lot of unknowns. We don't know how many families will choose the Virtual Academy or in-person instruction. This will require us to be flexible and responsive as we move forward. If we feel the health and safety of our students or staff is in jeopardy, we will make changes to our Plan.

Additionally, families have a lot of questions about the Virtual Academy option. We will open enrollment for the BCPS Virtual Academy by the end of this week. We have also scheduled a Parent University online session to provide an overview of what parents can expect with the Virtual Academy to allow them to make an informed decision.

Superintendent Carter advised the BCPS Plan is being presented to the Board this evening to offer our families a choice. Those families who believe in-person is best will have that choice. Those who do not want to send their students to school at this time and need an effective way to continue learning will have the option of the BCPS Virtual Academy.

With that, Superintendent Carter returned the discussion to President Karen Evans.

President Karen Evans clarified with Superintendent Carter that the Board will be voting on the BCPS Return to School Plan tonight. Superintendent Carter confirmed that is what we are asking.

Trustee Jackie Slaby asked Superintendent Carter to clarify for the public that the Board already approved the BCPS Virtual Academy at the last Board Meeting. Superintendent Carter indicated that was correct and thanked Trustee Slaby for that clarification.

There was discussion about a hybrid approach and why BCPS did not pursue this avenue. Superintendent Carter indicated that based on our resources, staffing, and days and hours required, we were not able to implement a hybrid approach. She noted there were a lot of other opportunities that just were not within the realm for BCPS at this time.

Motion by Vice President Catherine LaValley to take a vote on the reopening of school for the 2020-2021 School Year.

Trustee Art McClenney supported the Motion.

President Karen Carter advised the Motion was now open for discussion and asked if any of the Board Members had any comments.

Secretary Kyra Wallace asked if we know what class sizes will look like for Grades K-5. Superintendent Carter responded classes are capped for K-5 at around 25, but all class sizes are contingent on how many students show up for in-person and how many select the Virtual Academy. We will redistribute students based on the number who choose virtual because we want to keep class sizes lower than 25, but it is all dependent on enrollment.

Secretary Kyra Wallace asked to clarify that, within every single class, there will be 2 adults as opposed to 1. Superintendent Carter reported there will not be 2 adults in all classrooms. We don't know how many staff members are returning, but we plan to place additional staff members in the classrooms with the most need.

Trustee Jackie Slaby reported that she will be voting "no" to the BCPS Reopening Plan. She commented we are living in an unprecedented time. The proposed Plan is to develop a "new normal". It is not about how perfect we want the Superintendent or the Board to look, we must serve the community to the best of our ability. We need to slow down and look at this in a long-term approach, even though it requires urgency. The sense of urgency makes us feel like there is no time to include everyone or to think through things. She feels we do have more options than this and that our collective efforts will result in transforming this institution. It is the Board's responsibility to serve all students and it is not about being perfect but rather reducing harm and making the change that is material for all.

After laying this all out, she will be voting "no" on the plan. She acknowledged the tireless hours that staff has put in but it would be remiss to vote "yes" to students coming back to school when she attends Board Meetings remotely.

Trustee Jackie Slaby feels the Plan leaves much to be desired. She believes all students deserve to be respected and it is clear from the last meeting that our Spanish and Burmese families are continually left out. It was not equity when the meetings with these families were scheduled in less than 48 hours. She questioned what the purpose of these sessions was, just to tell families what will happen to them, while we pride ourselves for providing restorative practices saying we will work with families, not to or for. She wondered what it could like if we worked with the community instead of telling them how it will be. We need to look at the bigger, long-term picture. She has experienced BCPS as a student, alum and now as a Board Member and she has heard this from local community too many times and we have a reputation for it. Trustee Slaby said today we have a creative Superintendent and staff and we need to rise to the challenge; she looks forward to our being flexible and creating better models.

She closed by commenting there is no one size fits all model, but she does believe there is a model that is the right size for our community and feels we can be better and do better. Trustee Slaby implored her fellow Trustees to vote "no" to the Plan presented tonight.

Trustee Art McClenney commented that he has wrestled with this proposal for the last week or two, looking at it from a parent's view. He has kids and he had to ask himself if he would bring his kids back to school. Trustee McClenney said it is a difficult decision and he has wrestled over and over about it. He has had conversations with Superintendent Carter and asked questions and he still hasn't made up his mind which way to go.

Trustee Art McClenney shared he has had plenty of emails from an awful lot of people, some wanting to open the school and some wanting to keep it closed. He said there just isn't an answer that is going to make everyone happy, there just isn't. He has an opportunity to talk with a mother who has 2 school-age daughters and he asked her opinion as an outside source. She has the opportunity to keep her kids out of school and pay for a babysitter to monitor them, but she said if the safeguards are put in place, she would send her kids back to school. What was most relevant to him was this mother doesn't have to do that. With all the noise about this decision, here is a person who has the means to take care of her kids if they aren't in school and is confident enough with the safeguard put in place to send her kids back to school, it made him change his mind again.

Trustee Art McClenney shared he was wearing his mask tonight because he is at work and he wanted the kids out there to see that he is modeling for them. He has to wear a mask at work all day and that's what we are asking our kids to do, which will be a challenge. He read an article today that in Georgia they have been in school for 4 days and in those 4 days, there are 260 cases of COVID, which sends him back to the decision that maybe it's not a good idea to reopen, he just doesn't know.

Trustee Art McClenney thanked Superintendent Carter and the staff for coming up with this Plan, noting it wouldn't matter which Plan they came up with, not everyone would be happy. He has a lot to say and will probably say more during Board Comments at the end. He has thought about this from a parent's view and also from the view of those we serve, the people in the community. He has heard a lot about equity and he had to think about this for the kids in the District and who would be hurt if they aren't in school and how far behind they will fall. He said there are kids whose parents have the means to access the internet and others who don't. Some parents are in a situation where they will either have to lose their job to stay home or leave their kids home alone. All of this has to be taken into consideration. Some of our staff are ready to have students. These are all things that he wrestles with as he tries to decide. He likes the idea and again thanks the Administrative Team for providing a Plan that offers families a choice. He thinks that is important. That if families are not comfortable sending their students back, they have a choice.

With that in mind, Trustee Art McClenney advised he is going to support this proposal because parents do have a choice. With the assurance from Superintendent Carter that, if our students or staff become in any danger or if she isn't sure that she can do this safely, she will come back to the Board and present another Plan. He asked if the Board has Superintendent Carter's word on that. Superintendent Carter was muted and when she couldn't respond, Trustee McClenney said he knows he does have her word. It was a tough decision, but he will be supporting the proposal to the Board and anything else he wants to say will be done in Board Comments.

Superintendent Carter commented she wanted to clarify but wanted to make sure she has heard from all Board first.

Vice President Catherine LaValley commented as we've seen in this past week, this is a very emotional issue and she agrees with Trustee McClenney and has wrestled with this decision. Like Trustee Slaby, she appreciates all the work that has been done to make this Plan to submit to the State. It is remarkable work.

Vice President LaValley shared that, as we wrestle with this decision, we need to remember it is due to the fact this hideous disease has put us in unprecedented chaos and we are showing leadership as we go forward. She disagrees with K-5 students having masks on all day and that concerns her. She is thankful that the MI Road Map left it up to the schools to decide that. She appreciates knowing that if a child refuses to wear a mask, the parent will be contacted to help with the situation and provide guidance for the child to make sure they are wearing a mask. As far as where her vote is tonight, she has gone back and forth, back and forth.

Vice President Catherine LaValley noted this is a new beginning for all of us at BCPS and we should be really excited right now to be starting school in a couple of weeks – it goes along with Back to School shopping, clothing and the traditions that help us get excited. She has received lots of emails and couple of phone calls and it concerns her that we are not excited for Back to School. She understands the Virtual Academy has to be starting at the beginning of the school year and going to the end of the school year because we are making a financial commitment to it. She agrees with Trustee Slaby that we needed more input from families. We know it's been tried but we still can't give up on families being heard. She offers these thoughts to continue this discussion.

Trustee Charlie Fulbright indicated he wanted to comment, noting he was not trying to be rude, but he pre-wrote his comments that he will be reading from his side monitor. He feels that he has done as much due diligence as possible in preparation for tonight's vote. He has received many emails, heard from people, given lots of ideas on what we can and should do and ultimately it is not his role, but rather the Administration Team's role to sort through and present a Plan.

Trustee Charlie Fulbright noted safety and equity are his priorities, but it is hard decision for those two issues to work together. He understands not wanting to send kids back to school. The Virtual Academy will be good for our older learning students, but not helpful for working parents, and that face-to-face learning will be better for our younger students. There are many variables on both sides and he has gone back and forth on this decision and how to vote.

This morning on the news it showed people protesting - one side of the street showed people against in-person school and the other side of the street showed people who wanted to return in-person. This made it clear that, at the end of the day, one group of people will be mad at his vote and for that he is sorry. Many people have reached out and given him their thoughts. No Plan is perfect and there is no solution that will make 100% of people and staff happy. He commented the Administration and all those behind the scenes have done a tremendous job on this Plan and he does not want that to go unnoticed. BCPS has an amazing Team and there is always room for improvement. He has been brainstorming his top 3 priorities, which are Safety, Equity and Attendance. Safety is the most important and Equity is right behind. These are the driving force behind his vote.

Treasurer Patty Poole-Gray had no comment.

Trustee Jackie Slaby commented that based on feedback from many different families and staff, she is more inclined to favor the remote learning model for Grades K-5 so parents don't feel like their only option is self-guided. That would be more in line for single parent working homes or as an option for other families. She would like to see further exploration around the structure for person-to-person instruction, reduced class sizes and partnering with the community to do that. She would also like to explore safety protocols to include as many kids as possible.



Superintendent Carter thanked each of the Trustees for serving in this capacity and noted she had talked with many of them and it is a difficult decision. She clarified that it is hard to make the best decisions when none are the best for all kids.

Superintendent Carter also clarified and takes responsibility for not providing all information at the last meeting. She advised that we did reach out to families about the Plan. We had over 200 families, we did surveys, and we did include Spanish and Burmese families. Superintendent Carter advised that we have a full-time Burmese Coordinator and a full-time Latino Coordinator who works with our families. They made personal phone calls and Superintendent Carter was not aware of the extent of those calls until last week. She knows we could do better with organizing the Q&A Sessions. We do not have all the time in the world to make this decision and are trying to process and make the best plans because Boards are responsible for making sure their Return to School Plans are into the ISD by August 15<sup>th</sup>.

Superintendent Carter noted we are making decisions with a lot of unknowns and we don't know how many families will enroll. The most important thing is to limit class sizes to the best of our ability and we know based on discussions with the Health Department that co-horting can mitigate the risk. We are bringing this Plan so those families who didn't engage in learning in the Spring can bring their kids back to school. We will minimize movement, co-hort students, and limit the number of close contacts. We will have full-time nurses in every school building.

After the Staff Q&A, our Plan did change because the original plan was for students to wear masks during movement and the staff asked for masks all day. Based on the Community Q&A, we heard families express concerns about socialization, so we are exploring socialization opportunities with staff. She noted if we have more resources and more staff, we could be open to being more creative.

The State of Michigan has different requirements than the State of Texas or the State of California, not all States have the same level of plans to implement and we took that into consideration, we wanted to offer our families the option of choices, i.e. safe in-person learning or for those who don't feel safe, the Virtual Academy option.

Superintendent Carter advised that, even if we don't make it through this Plan, we are committed to adjusting to new information (every day we receive new information), and remaining flexible and responsive. She is grateful to serve a Board that has equity at the center of their focus. She thanked Trustee Slaby for the passion she expressed. She is excited to be part of this Team.

A Roll Call Vote was taken.

**Motion passed 4 – 3**

President Karen Evans thanked Superintendent Carter and the Board members, noting this was a lot of work and not everyone will be happy, it is impossible for everyone to be happy.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

President Karen Evans read the Public Comments aloud.

Brittani

1417 Capital Avenue NE

I recently attended a family funeral at the Fort Custer National Cemetery. We were limited to 20 people in attendance, even at an outside function. I am concerned as to how you plan to keep staff and students safe with upwards of 300-+ students at each school. Why not go Virtual as neighboring Districts have? I am concerned about the possibility of teachers being asked to come in to teacher Virtually? What will teachers do who have children to care for? Will you provide child care options?

Jamie Whitehead

35 East Baldwin

Why isn't remote learning an option for K-5 and only Virtual, which has very little support offered and is essentially me homeschooling just under the BCPS name?

Brenda McGrew

409 McKinley Avenue N

I am still concerned on opening the school back up for students and staff. It's not fair for children or safe for them to wear masks all day. These are my feelings.

Toni Ardis

242 Oriole Drive

I know the decision you made was not easy. Thank you for all you do to support our students.

## **SUPERINTENDENT COMMENTS**

Superintendent Carter again thanked everyone and said she recognizes this was a difficult decision. She is personally committed to keep the health and safety of our students and staff as a top priority. She noted that although we have a framework, there is still an opportunity to receive feedback and massage the Plan. We will re-open for our younger students who want to return and we will offer the Virtual Academy for those who don't. The difficult part is having so many unknowns and we will ask the community to be patient as we respond to concerns of the community.

Superintendent Carter stated, if at any time, we feel we cannot keep students and staff safe, we will return and ask the Board for a different Plan. First and fore most we want to bring students back because education saves lives. It is the way out and the way over. We want to give kids every opportunity to succeed. The Return to School Plan was born out of a clear focus that those who are situated furthest from the opportunity have the opportunity, but at the same time, we don't know what tomorrow holds.

Superintendent Carter thanked the Board and President Karen Evans for the opportunity to serve.

## **BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS**

Vice President Catherine LaValley commented this has been an interesting meeting tonight and she thinks we see an opportunity that could be a blessing for each and every one of us. She thinks we can do better and, as Superintendent Carter mentioned, make more tweaks that allow the District to move forward. Vice President LaValley thanked Superintendent Carter and the staff for their due diligence and it means a lot to her that we will be able to educate students.

Secretary Kyra Wallace just wanted to say this was a very, very difficult decision to make because, like Superintendent Carter stated, there are so many unknowns and making decisions based on not knowing yet is difficult, but a decision had to be made due to time parameters. She pointed out that, although a decision was made and the Plan was approved, as with any plan, we can always make amendments. As we receive feedbacks, learn enrollments and different things of that nature, we can amend as needed to provide whatever is better for the community.

Trustee Art McClenney just wanted to follow-up with his fellow Board Members that he is still tortured on his decision tonight and probably will be. He prays for our children, not only the ones going to school but the ones at home. He said if anyone knows anything about him, he is passionate about kids, very passionate. He has worked with kids and had the difficult experience of working with a kid who committed suicide and it's hard to live with that. He also wanted to say this is unprecedented times but with the Board Meetings being on Zoom, the Board has had the chance to see the Public Comments and he thanked those who have encouraged the Board and those who have talked personally about this decision.

Trustee Art McClenney shared he hears a lot of people say if I was on the board, I would do this or do that, and he wanted to make it clear, as Trustee Slaby has said for weeks now, there were Board seats open, 3 seats, and he sat in Marshall in the parking lot outside the County Clerk's Office Building to keep an eye on the Board seat opening and up until 3:45pm, with 4:00pm being the deadline, not one person went over there to file an application for a seat. Trustee McClenney said he loves this District and there is a need for people to be on the Board and make the undesired and desired decisions. This opportunity will be available again in 2 years. He encouraged the community to apply. He said he used to be like them, he had a lot to say and then found out some different things, so if you are going to complain, the next time these seats are up, he would encourage you to go over and get a petition and run for one of the seats.

Trustee Jackie Slaby shared with the Board and Superintendent Carter that she signed up for a National Association of School Boards Webinar that is tomorrow and is on the topic of Mental Health COVID Social and Emotional Wellbeing. She thinks this webinar will be insightful whether we are conducting in-person or virtual learning. The webinar is free and she will be happy to share the information for anyone who wants to sign-up. President Karen Evans and Trustee Art McClenney both indicated they were interested.

Trustee Charlie Fulbright said, just like everyone else, he feels like this was a hard decision to make and noted he thinks this was his first time voting against the majority. Trustee Fulbright indicated even though he cast a “no” vote, he will support the Board’s decision and he thanked the Administration Team and people behind the scenes who created this proposal. He commented that things can always be improved and he will support doing that all he can. Trustee Fulbright also thanked all those who reached out to give their thoughts to make sure Back to School is done in a great way. He closed with “Great Things Are Happening at BCPS”.

Meeting adjourned – 6:35p.m.

Submitted by  
Patti Worden

Kyra Wallace  
Board Secretary