



Blacksburg New School

www.blacksburgnewschool.org

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Est. 1971

July 30, 2020

Hello,

Another week of progress has been made getting us closer to the start of school. As of now, we remain in Phase 3 and are moving forward with our opening plans. As noted below, we are finalizing policies, schedules, and procedures as well as formalizing our TRO program and needs in order to help ensure as smooth a transition to the start of school as possible.

Again, we would like to remind everyone that [the community padlet](#) can be used as an ongoing way to ask questions. (And YES! Someone does read it.) This will be monitored and our FAQ documents will be updated if repeated questions are received. Other questions will be answered as needed. You can also reach out to your classroom board representative, detailed below, or to the board on the whole.

If there's one thing we can count on this year, it's unpredictability. It will require greater flexibility and patience and grace – both for ourselves and our fellow BNS families. I know we said this last week, but it bears repeating: If we remember that we are not making these sacrifices alone, but as a community and for each other then we can be confident that we can make it through this unusual time with our incredible community intact.

Sincerely,
The BNS Board

Previous weekly updates files in [this google drive](#) and this [dropbox folder](#)

Classroom Board Representatives -

Red - Courtney Simón Grohs; csgrohs@gmail.com

Orange - Jen Irish or Robert Weiss; jennifer.l.irish@gmail.com or weiszro@gmail.com

Yellow - Cindy Smith; clsmith125@comcast.net

Green - Kiyah Duffey; kiyah.duffey@gmail.com

Turquoise - Julie Fox; juliefox.nrvbirth@gmail.com

Blue - Cara Daggett; caranew@gmail.com

Purple - Stan Harvey or Kiyah Duffey; stanford.a.harvey@gmail.com, kiyah.duffey@gmail.com

Planning Committees Updates

Education Logistics Committee

- Discussed what happens if we have to transition between Phases. The committee discussed implementing an automatic 2-day teacher work day buffer for any announced transition between phases.
- The committee also alerted the board to the need to determine how fluidly students can move in between in-person and fully remote learning. What is a reasonable amount of time needed for teachers to prepare for moving to fully remote and for families to transition to coming back in person. It was discussed that 1 day notice was probably sufficient and that teachers wanted families to be able to move as fluidly as possible.
- The committee briefly discussed the standard school day as defined by VA. This sets the standard school year at 180 instructional days or 990 instructional hours unless a waiver is granted. In the spring an executive order was issued overriding these standards which also meant that a waiver was not needed. Our contact at VCPE has confirmed that the state has applied for a waiver, which would mean it applied to all schools in VA. This does not change what BNS intends to do for our in-person learners; students will still be expected to complete a small amount of at-home remote learning.
- We discussed staggered drop-off and pick-up times and strategies for limiting the need for parents to get out of the car, ways to use parent volunteers to shuttle students safely, and whether and how daily health screening will be conducted.
- The board is deciding how daily health screening will be implemented and how, if at all, daily records will be kept.
- Families can expect that daily health screenings will also ask about symptoms for other communicable illnesses. Students who are experiencing any symptoms of communicable illness will not be allowed into the building. The [CDC released new guidelines for daily screening and return to school policies](#). BNS plans to continue with daily health screening. Return to school policies state:

“Students who are sick with contagious illnesses should not attend school, but most illnesses do not require the same level or length of isolation that COVID-19 does. Excluding students from school for longer than what is called for in existing school policies (e.g., fever free without medication for 24-hours) based on COVID-19 symptoms alone risks repeated, long-term unnecessary student absence.”

The health committee and board are still discussing what, if anything, these CDC changes mean for our return to school policies.
- Virginia has applied for a waiver on the issue of what is considered full time in school. Our contact at VCPE believes that it is most likely that the hours/days will be waived again this school year. This doesn't change our plan, and we still expect some at-home learning for person learning. MCPS board plans to discuss this issue at the 8/4 board meeting.
- Finally, the committee discussed online behavioral guidelines and expectations. The teachers are preparing these, with full support of the board. This will be a necessary shift from the Spring 2020 where families could pick and choose what they participated in or completed. Kids will fall behind if they aren't able to regularly stay on top of content.

Teachers and the board also recognize the need for flexibility on timelines (asynchronous/synchronous) for remote learning and regular, open communication will be critical.

Online Education Committee

- In collaboration with the Online Education Committee, teachers are beginning to determine their technology needs for providing remote learning.
- The committee is concerned with bandwidth issues if all teachers need to be providing synchronous learning simultaneously. We are working on solutions, including with Wide Open Blacksburg (although that won't be ready until late August or early/mid September).
- Comcast was identified as problematic at the town level - not an individual's home/organization.
- Recommended equipment packages are coming. We have also reached out to a former BNS parent who works at MCPS to see if there is a recommended package that the county is using in their classrooms.

Facilities

- Quotes on 20' x 40' tarps have been collected (two will be used to create our 40' x 40' outdoor classrooms). Poles and connectors can be manufactured in 3 days and delivered in another 3-5.
- Heavy duty tarps will also be purchased to cover.
- 5 outdoor hand washing stations have also been ordered and will be installed.
- Joe and Kiyah met at the school last weekend and measured every exhaust, fresh air intake, return, and supply in every room in the elementary school and middle school. These data were used with the meeting with A1 Heating and Cooling this morning.
- With A1 Joe discussed doing a manual override on the fresh air dampers.
- Cost for servicing is \$120/unit.

Communications

- Communications committee is reviewing the questions for daily health screenings, as well as the return to school policy (updates from CDC came today, Thursday, one day after the communications meeting), Travel Guidelines, and Self-Quarantine Guidelines.
- In collaboration with the Personnel Committee and Health Committee we are working to draft our Statement of Community Responsibility. Once completed, this will be shared with the community and signing (and returning) will be part of our return to school paperwork.
- We have also seen the notes on the community padlet (Yes, someone is checking!). We are looking closely at our previous FAQs and will be updating those as additional frequently asked questions come in. As we stated last time, questions can also come through your board reps, ombudsperson, or your classroom teacher.
- The Health Committee's notes include recommendations for features to look for in selecting a mask for your kids. Our committee would like to encourage your kids to practice wearing a mask for a little while. We are working on building the daily schedule

so that there are multiple mask breaks, but practice with wearing one for increasingly longer stretches will be valuable.

- Our committee is also working to set up a Q&A for the teachers with the health committee on August 5th.
- The communications committee is also reviewing the updated website to provide feedback on its usability and structure. This website is intended to get us through until a proper website can be developed. It was created by someone {cough ... Kiyah cough} who is decidedly NOT a web developer. However, the point of this new site was to have something that a greater number of people could easily update as needed. This new one should be viewed as a bandaid not a long-term solution.

Personnel Committee

- Personnel committee is setting up a health training for teachers on August 11th. This will be made available for any TRO that needs it.
- The committee met with our parent legal council to discuss items such as: employee personal travel, policies for self-quarantine, leave request, assumption of risk forms, and protecting vulnerable populations in our school.
- Personnel committee and the board president have drafted a remote learning liaison position description. It has been given to the teachers for feedback and will be shared with the Hiring Chair ASAP.
- Our personnel chair is constantly checking in with teachers to ensure that they have what they need and are supported.

Health Committee

- The health committee's policies are being reviewed by the communications team. Those will be shared widely as soon as they are ready. (ultimately they will be shared in our drive and dropbox and likely on our website as well).
- The committee (thank you Ash!) created a document about ***What to look for when buying a mask, along with some information about putting on and taking off PPE.*** ***This can all be found in [our shared google drive](#) and [our shared dropbox folder](#).***