



Blacksburg New School

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Est. 1971

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Hello,

I hope that you have all had a great week. As was true last week, the 2020-2021 scenario planning committees continue to make strides moving us forward toward opening this fall. BNS still plans to open on time (August 13th), in part to maximize any time we can have in-person with greater access to outdoor environments. BNS is committed to meeting or exceeding VDOE guidelines and is employing a number of strong risk mitigation strategies which are known to be effective, especially when used in concert (e.g., masks, distance, hand hygiene, limiting significant classroom/cohort mixing). We are working with our teachers to ensure that they have the resources to support an equitable and robust online learning environment. Until told otherwise, we plan to continue with our Phase 3 opening guidelines. We will make changes to these plans as dictated by changes in our local, county, or states health department or by mandate from the governor. Although we have begun planning for a transition between Phases, the details of those new recommendations are still emerging so there will be ongoing monitoring.

Over these last several we have continued to collect information and feedback from parents and teachers. The board has one last meeting with teachers on Friday, after which we will make a decision about the 2020-2021 schedule (days/week and hours/day). Making this decision will allow us to move forward planning the remaining logistics for our daily schedule, pick-up/drop-off, daily operations and procedures, etc. In the coming week, much of our planning committees' work will begin to taper off and transition to the teachers with strategic support from key community members as needed.

We would like to remind everyone that [the community padlet](#) can be used as an ongoing way to ask questions. Answers to these questions will be addressed in updated FAQ documents which will be placed on the BNS website and stored in our folders. I received additional questions about the decision we factors BNS is considering as part of our mitigation plans. These were detailed in the board letter last week ([found here](#)) and can also be found detailed in [this document](#) of in-person learning scenarios –logistics considerations. We will also continue to monitor the health department and VDOE guidelines/requirements for schools.

With warmest regards,

The BNS Board

July 15th weekly update filed [here](#)
Additional Resources [here](#)

Planning Committees Updates

Education Logistics & Online Learning

- Plans for the transition from Phase 3 to Phase 2 (if/when necessary) were discussed. At this time, the general plan is to follow our current Phase 3 guidelines for K-3 only, and to shift 4-8 into fully remote learning, which is in compliance with current VDOE guidance. If VA does go to Phase 2 we will need to verify that VDOE guidance remains the same and/or adjust our transition and learning plan accordingly. This situation is being closely monitored.
- The Health Logistics team shared several Health items documents with our committee for review and discuss. Our committee can continue to comment on these working documents. We are grateful to review these and contribute to them.
- We discussed the importance of being very thorough and transparent in our description of HVAC actions as part of COVID-19 risk mitigation. These are discussed in more detail in the Facilities section. This process is critical given how important it is as a risk mitigation strategy that our ventilation systems meet or exceed ASHRAE standards. Fortunately, meeting or exceeding ASHRAE standards - which BNS intends to verify - would go significantly beyond current VDOE guidance and is considered a critical best practice given current research on aerosol-based transmission of COVID-19.
- We discussed plans for outdoor space. Currently we are planning for 5 40x40 outdoor classroom spaces. A 40x40 outdoor teacher break area is also being discussed. These spaces will be mapped out to evaluate how much outdoor space remains for other use (e.g., recess, additional outdoor classroom space).
- Given the location of these outdoor spaces, BNS will not reorder mulch this year (which costs \$2k) since the mulch play area will not be used for recess. Presently, recess spaces are being identified as the back part of the soccer field, the space by the “big tree”, and the creek bed. Classes would rotate through recess.
- - Estimated ratios of in-person:remote learners were collected by teachers and board representatives. These numbers are available below:

Classroom	In-Person/Leaning In-Person	Online/Leaning Online	Undecided
Red	10	4	--
Orange	5	2	2
Yellow	9	4	--
Green	6	2	1
Turquoise	9	3	--
Blue	11	1	--
Purple	17	10	3

- The Online Learning Committee has produced a document regarding possible systems and support for teachers and families engaged in online learning. There are several remaining questions which the committee needs input from teachers. This document has been shared with teachers for feedback and further discussion to ensure that needs are met.
- The Online Learning Committee has also been working with Wide Open Blacksburg to install a tower (or maybe fiber optic cable) to improve the school's bandwidth. They are also discussing whether or not the teachers would like to have the capability to use any technology in the outdoor classrooms. Equipment will be needed if so.
- There is a board and teacher meeting on Friday to discuss the school schedule and other remaining concerns that the teachers have/considerations they would like the board to address. The board plans to make a final decision about the school schedule following that meeting. We will also determine if a home-to-school liaison is needed for online learning and how that position could best be utilized.
- The teachers have selected Canvas as their preferred LMS/platform.
- In addition to balancing the demands on teacher time and prioritizing safety for students and teachers, families have also requested that their voice for concern over the potential loss of in-person teaching time - by reducing the school week from 5 to 4 days and hours/day from 9-2 to 9-1. These changes represent a considerable loss of in-person instructional time and a departure from the board's "open fully" decision. There are families in our school who fear the loss of jobs without in-person schooling and these concerns wanted to have this concern noted for the community and the board's consideration.
- A brief discussion about TROs identified that there will be some needs for adult TRO volunteers but that for health and safety reasons, this need should be minimized, adults would have to follow as strict protocols as parents, and these positions should only be considered if they are deemed necessary to improve the teacher's ability to perform their duties or to improve the educational experience of our children. Keeping these additional parents outside only is ideal.

Facilities

- It was confirmed that our Individual desks would be delivered in early August, There will be no need for assembly.
- The container (for classroom storage) has been power washed and painted (huge thanks to Joe, Jen and Robert for making that happen). Teachers are going to begin clearing out their classrooms. There may be a request for help as part of our "get school ready" activities. Details will follow either from your classroom teacher, a board rep, or someone on the facilities committee. The key to making this storage container work is thoughtful (3D tetris-like) use of space.
- We finally heard from the town regarding permission to have a container like this on our property. A town inspector came Wednesday July 22 to look at the container and document. We may have to pay \$30 for a permit to house it on our property. It's not likely that a fence would be required around the container.

- Several individuals have been working to track down a time for maintenance on the air handlers/HVAC system. Three different companies have been contacted.
- Middle school flow testing of the HVAC system was completed today. By design, the system has more than adequate flow according to ASHRAE standards. Exhaust fans in Amethyst and Plum were measured at 233 CFM. Eggplant was measured at 367 CFM when the closet door was open, 315 CFM when closed. (The facilities group will either increase the gap at the bottom or top of doors or add an additional vent between the classrooms and location of the exhaust fans to further improve circulation). The science room and two middle school bathrooms had flow rates that were lower (29, 47, and 18 respectively) than spec'd and lower than they should be according to the rating of the installed exhaust fan. We will continue to investigate the causes of these anomalies with our indoor maintenance team and through consultation with the HVAC companies.
- Joe has been brainstorming ways to increase outdoor air pyll while students and staff are in the building and to ensure that we decrease this exchange at night and on the weekends. We are considering installing a timer at the exhaust fan switch so that we can more precisely control the extent to which the system needs to pull in and heat/cool fresh air.
- Individual free-standing HEPA filters have been ordered for each room, offices, and the conference and teacher workroom.
- A UV sterilizer (standing, room sterilizer) has also been ordered.
- All cleaning supplies and MERV 13 filters have been ordered.
- New toilet seats have been ordered with soft close lids.
- Fans are being ordered for windows

Communication

- The communication committee is working with our health committee to set up a Q&A and training (two separate events) for our teachers to ensure that their questions are answered and they have the necessary training to start the year. We will let the teachers know when this is scheduled.
- The committee will pull the FAQ document previously created and ensure that there is a princess for updating and that it is current with what we know now. These documents will live on our website in addition to the other places they are stored.
- We will also explore options for our daily screening form. A couple of options were recommended including finding a parent who can code and will create an app for BNS (less likely) or using a pre-built option like the survey monkey app (more likely).
- In collaboration with the personnel committee, the communications committee will collect questions and concerns that remain with the teachers so we can help to address them and provide training and resources needed to start the school year prepared.
- Again, we point you to [the community padlet](#) which can be used as a way to ask questions. Answers to those questions will be addressed in updated FAQ documents. These documents will be placed on the BNS website as well as our shared google drive folder.

Personnel

- Our personnel committee continues to work with the teachers to ensure that they have the resources (including professionally and personally) to feel safe and prepared for their job.
- A meeting with the teachers and board has been scheduled for Friday.
- We have also reached out to two parent attorneys to help us understand any personnel related issues we need to be aware of.

Health

- The Health Committee has continued to work on a number of documents including:
 - Daily Health Screening Form
 - Activities Guidelines to Reduce Transmission
 - Handwashing Policies and Guidelines
 - Travel Guidelines
 - Self-Quarantine/School Absence Policy
 - PPE recommendations for teachers
- Although these documents will be updated as needed, they are still in draft form. The committee is meeting again tomorrow and will continue to update the documents. These will be shared widely once they are complete.
- The health committee shared a presentation and FAQ from Dr. Noelle Bissel, the New River Health District Director, who [spoke last night at the MCPS Board Meeting](#) for their school reopening plan. Her presentation starts at **5:45:00 (Five Hours and 45 minutes)**. She provides an overview of the health and safety considerations we are all facing in reopening schools. She also fielded many challenging questions similar to ones we have and have received. She also discusses the role of the health department in contact tracing.
- The health committee is clarifying the definition of “close contact”.
- The health committee also reminded everyone of the kids’ mask recommendations made by Linsey Marr. Those can be [found here](#).
- The committee has talked about lunch and the potential difficulty for eating at school while maintaining a safe environment.