



July 15, 2020

Good evening everyone,

What. A Week. Since our board meeting Wednesday, the planning committees have made some great forward movement, which the board is excited to share with you on their behalf. Although we tried to create a more streamlined system for collecting this important and distilling it into a brief update for you, I was unable to get this out earlier. In the future, we may try to send shorter updates, more frequent updates – especially when there are new documents, policies, or resources for you to review – in advance of the weekly email. We have also added our regularly scheduled planning meetings to the BNS calendar for those of you who would like to join (either to participate or listen in). If you would like to [join a committee](#), the committee chairs have asked that you reach out to them to ensure that you have necessary background reading and preparation.

Last week, the Board charged the planning committee with building out a plan to maximize in-person learning within existing health and state guidelines, while simultaneously providing a separate, fully remote and virtual learning option. Some parents are supportive of this decision, while others continue to feel uncertainty around implementation. We wanted to take a moment to remind everyone that while the most recent surveys were part of the information that factored into our decision, they represented only one point of information in a very long process of planning, research, and consultation with parents, teachers, and experts. The Board's decision was not made lightly (nor unanimously) and was based on many factors, including:

- what subcommittees have researched and recommended as feasible and aligned with health experts' advice and that meets or exceeds reopening guidelines, especially given the array of risk mitigation tools we plan to implement -- wearing masks (which will be required at all times when inside the building), physical distancing, increased hygiene protocols (e.g., frequent handwashing), proper air circulation and ventilation, improving HVAC filtration (to eliminate smaller particles), more frequent cleaning and disinfecting, limiting the number of adults who enter the school, and limiting interactions between class groups;
- updated VDOE guidelines, whose safety recommendations we will meet or exceed upon reopening, as well as considerations and reopening plans from other schools (both public and private) and guidance from our local health department contacts and other agencies;
- our financial outlook, school capacity, teacher workload, education best practices, continuity of education, and core value considerations; and
- feedback from families and teachers via surveys (the most recent and from the spring) and town halls, but also through the over 20 parents and teachers who volunteered to participate in the planning committees. That inclusive process, in particular, allowed for

healthy debate and discussion in which multiple perspectives were well represented. While consensus was not reached, we all learned from, and engaged extensively with, the diversity of viewpoints that parents and teachers continue to bring to these conversations. Of course, as we have seen happen regularly these past several months, much of this might change in the days and weeks to come, and we will have to adjust. We are setting ourselves up to be ready to adjust.

Related to this point, the most recent parent and teacher surveys were intended to serve as a tool for families to provide the same feedback as solicited at the town hall meetings (the same questions were asked). Because of the way the survey was designed and administered, we do not know the extent to which it is a representative sample of individual BNS children or families. Some families may have been represented by two parents responding, while others may not have submitted a response at all. Finally, the answers to the “untenable” opening scenario not mutually exclusive, which has important implications for their analysis. It was careless to present those numbers without providing the additional qualitative data, but I (Kiyah) made the decision not to present any qualitative data to the broader community because that was not the context under which the survey was given to you. If you would like more details on the specifics of the numbers or details associated with question #2 please email me (or the board). I/We are happy to talk about those details with you.

We do not share these points as a way to prove that our decision was *right*. Rather, we hope to show you that we care about all of these points and about how they impact all of our families. We all have the best interests of the community, our children, and our teachers at heart. We are faced with an incredible opportunity to build upon the unique strengths and values of BNS to create a path forward that shepherds our community, and our children, through the coming year, even as we anticipate many shifts ahead. We are grateful that you continue to be part of this ongoing conversation.

With warmest regards,

The BNS Board

July 15<sup>th</sup> weekly update filed [here](#)  
Additional Resources [here](#)

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## Planning Committee Updates

### 1. Personnel Committee

- a. The personnel committee has begun compiling a document which details the teachers' concerns and needs.
- b. We have begun compiling committee to-do list with timeline (much of our work will be done after deciding school operation schedule)
- c. Started conversation about policy regarding substitutes and have flagged this as an area that needs the health committee's input.
- d. In collaboration with the Health Logistics Committee, we have started drafting a set of BNS values which will support a statement of our community expectations and aspects of education that we want to pursue and cradle this year.
- e. The BNS personnel committee lead is reaching out to teachers. She will provide them with a draft of our health considerations for opening and anticipated (rough) daily schedule. The goal is to have a sense for whether our teachers feel comfortable coming back in person, given the existing guidelines and risk mitigation strategies being employed by BNS, and how many are not comfortable with the potential risk of teaching in-person.

### 2. Education Logistics (ELC) and Online Learning Committees (OLC)

- a. Two important documents are being prepared as reference for the entire BNS community and will be shared with you as soon as they are ready (my anticipated ready date is the end of the week). **If ready, these will be sent in advance of next Wednesday's update.**
  - i. *Health and Safety Considerations Guiding Education Logistics Decisions*, is being prepared to document and highlight the health and safety considerations being used by the education logistics committee. This is currently being reviewed by our health and safety committee.
  - ii. The second will be a *google sheet* - along with an introductory email - that asks for your participation (by classroom) to let us know whether you are leaning toward in person learning or away from it. The accompanying letter will outline the current details of our in-person plan and asks that you simply indicate which way you are currently learning given the existing information. This is not a binding decision. It is not a statement of what our daily schedule is going to be. But this information is critical for the committee to begin to create a daily schedule that meets all of our needs, ensures compliance with current guidelines (which may change again), and provides time and space for teachers to adequately engage their in-person and online learners.
- b. The OLC had its first meeting and is in preliminary discussions about the technology needs that may be required by teachers for the various strategies for implementing remote and online learning. They understand that time is of the essence and are working to identify technology needs and to ensure that we have those in place by the start of school.

- c. Several members of the OLC, along with our technology teacher, met with Wide Open Blacksburg from, whom we will be getting our internet. Wide Open Blacksburg provides upload speeds 50X higher and download speeds 5X higher, which will enhance our online learning capabilities.
- d. This broad committee is also beginning to think about when work transitions to the teachers and scheduling coordinator to determine what the day-to-day looks like for each classroom.

### 3. Facilities Committee

- a. Secured a 20' container to use for storing classroom supplies and furniture. It currently resides in the parking lot. It will need some sanding and a fresh coat of paint. The current lettering is not allowed.
- b. Individual trapezoid-shaped desks have been ordered (with a sizable portion of the total purchase price donated by a BNS parent).
- c. The facilities committee collected flow data for the HVAC system (using the art room as an example). The data collected aligned with the predictive models generated by our former BNS parent (and current grandparent) which had been created based on BNS floor plans/ manufacturing specs. This means that the actual performance is “as designed”, and that the design specifications are better than applicable ASHRAE standards \*when the system is heating or cooling\*. We are still finding ways to have the circulation and exhaust fan run continuously to provide filtration and fresh air \*when heating and cooling is not needed\*. Although the simplest solution would be to have the fan run all the time, we may also be able to employ CO2 sensors to indicate air freshness. The committee has also been exploring putting fans in windows, but we want to be mindful to not add additional tasks for teachers.
- d. Tents (tarps and poles) have been identified and purchased to create outdoor classroom space
- e. Scheduled coil cleaning with Stanley Steamer
- f. We have identified the necessary MERV 13 filters for HVAC system and are working to determine if those should be secured through the CARES Act (and thus purchased through MCPS) or secured on our own.
- g. Through VPCE, we have purchased extra PPE for the school
- h. Turquoise room was emptied to determine whether it would be possible to fit a full class (14 kids at 6' plus a teacher) and, if it was possible, what the layout would look like.
  - a. A honeycomb pattern allows for 14 kids at 6' whether the teacher is at the sink or the front of the room, however, having the teacher teach from the sink creates issues in this pattern for line of sight for two students.
  - b. In the turquoise room, 14 kids at 6' would require the removal of the classroom library and the teacher's desk (most likely).
  - c. Decreasing the distance between kids (from the front of one student's nose to back of another student's head) from 6' down to 5' eliminates the need to remove the class library.

- d. Although the layout is roughly similar in most classes (red room is a little more complicated), the same general results apply.
- i. It is important to note that additional risk mitigate strategies will be used along with this increased spacing (including increased fresh air circulation, higher MERV filters, additional free-standing HEPA filters, increased hand hygiene practices, and requiring masks at all times indoors).
- j. In collaboration with the Health Committee, the logistics committee is thinking about ways that kids can be grouped into smaller cohorts (e.g. this corner of the room eats snacks at same time, then the next corner of the room, etc.) which will help with contact tracing and isolation if/when needed.
- k. Three teachers met with the Blacksburg Fire Chief to look at the spacing of 14 students in a room. Turquoise Room - with most of the furniture removed - and 6' spaced spots on the floor was examined. The fire inspector said that the layout did not pose a problem with respect to fire code. We maintained a 3-foot space in front of the exit door. He understood the difference in guidelines to have spacing between desks as between 3' and 6'. He confirmed that these new distancing requirements likely make getting a wheelchair (if and when needed) into the room easier than before. He also confirmed that there is no need for aisles in the rooms among the kids. Finally, he confirmed that there are things that schools do that may not meet fire code (e.g. a student temporarily taking a test in a hallway; a student temporarily in front of an extra exit door for a lesson), but that these are not viewed as dangerous or problematic by the fire department as they are temporary conditions.
- l. Four 40' x 40' tarps and poles for outdoor classrooms are being ordered.

#### 4. **Communications Committee**

- a. The communications committee has set a standing meeting for Tuesdays from 5-6 pm. An invitation for this has been added to the BNS calendar. A zoom link will be added just as soon as I (kiyah) can create a recurring meeting!
- b. The communications team is working to ensure that the BNS mission and vision are still present and that the board finding ways to engage the community in this time when our in-person ways of building community are missing.
- c. The communication committee wants to remind everyone that despite making the decision to pursue “maximized in-person learning” it will not be business as usual; we will be following all recommended health guidance provided by the VDOE.
- d. We would like to remind everyone that [the community padlet](#) can be used as a way to ask questions, and answers to those questions will be addressed in updated FAQ documents. These documents will be placed on the BNS website. An update to our COVID planning page will be sent as soon as the new website domain has been changed and the website is live.
- e. The communications team is working to generate a BNS blog on the new website.
- f. In addition to the blog, we plan to ensure that regular, frequent email communications, facebook posts, BNS calendars (posted on the BNS website),

and other forms of communication are utilized regularly to ensure that families have multiple ways of receiving information.

- g. Relevant documents will be placed for the community to access either directly on our BNS website or in a Google drive.
- h. Messages on Facebook can also help to disseminate information and with building community.

#### **5. Health Logistics Committee**

- a. We are creating documents for parents and staff to review that detail the considerations that the education logistics committee is using to work through the in-person learning scenario.
- b. The committee is meeting on Friday. Any standing meeting will be added to the BNS calendar and shared with the community.
- c. The committee is additionally preparing documents related to health screening, cleaning procedures and protocols, travel and isolation guidelines, isolating sick students, etc. These are being edited. Once finalized, they will be shared with the community and will ultimately live on the BNS website.