

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION  
MINUTES**

**January 13, 2021**

The Montgomery County Board of Education convened in a special called meeting on Wednesday, January 13, 2021 at 6:00 pm at the Montgomery Central High School Auditorium. Board members present were Steven W. DeBerry – Chair, Tommy Blake – Vice Chair, Lynn Epps, Sandra Miller. Cindy Taylor and Bryan Dozier attended virtually. Jesse Hill was absent.

Chairman Steve DeBerry called the meeting to order and moved to adopt the agenda as shown. Tommy Blake made the motion with Sandra Miller seconding. The agenda was accepted with unanimous approval from the board.

During the public comments period four attendees signed up to speak to the board. Sharon Swanke a teacher at Montgomery Central High School thanked the board for their exemplary actions in keeping us safe this far. Swanke discussed how we have not been living our best lives during this pandemic and shared how colleagues have experienced COVID and loss of life. She encouraged the board to remember our responsibility noted on our agendas” III. NC Public School Students Will Be Healthy and Responsible.” Jason Hensley a teacher at our CTE Center and coach spoke to the board to make them aware of certification issues at the CTE Center. This year no CNAs or firefighters were certified. These classes depend on face-to-face learning to obtain these certificates. Due to the remote learning the CTE Center is not serving its intended purpose. Hensley asked the board to consider giving parents and students the option to attend these classes and obtain certifications. Leslie Parsons Shoffner spoke to the board sharing the struggle her family has faced with the loss of a loved one during a shortage of staff at the hospital. Shoffner asked the board to consider whether opening our schools would help or hurt our shortage of medical accessibility during this time. Cacelia Parter a custodian and bus driver at Green Ridge Elementary has prayed that we make the right decision. Parter stated that now is not the right time to bring kids back. This virus is spreading like wildfire. Parter mentioned the loss of Officer Bud who was a friend to all. Parter described how hard it is to watch friends and families who are in hospitals alone and on ventilators. She encouraged the board to look at these situations because this pandemic does not give identification to anyone.

Chairman Steve DeBerry explained that we had two board members Cindy Taylor and Bryan Dozier attending remotely to make a quorum.

Chairman DeBerry called upon Dr. Dale Ellis for his recommendation. Dr. Ellis shared the recent information regarding COVID cases concerning Montgomery County Schools’ staff and community as follows:

Montgomery County Schools  
COVID Data

Montgomery County School Staff COVID numbers

Month	Total Number of Staff Quarantined	Total Number of Staff testing Positive
November	67	12
December	56	14
January (as of 1/12/2021)	48	12*

\*One more positive case at EMS or WMS will result in a cluster that will have to be reported to the state.

Week of:	Montgomery County # of Positive cases	Montgomery County Number of Deaths	North Carolina # of Positive Cases	North Carolina Number of Deaths
11/1/20	32	1	17,461	194
11/8/20	45	2	22,789	257
11/15/20	61	1	25,105	257
11/22/20	62	1	24,379	297
11/29/20	101	1	39,787	352
12/6/20	84	1	40,046	369
12/13/20	136		43,031	306
12/20/20	106	1	33,682	211
12/27/20	175		50,973	139
1/3/2021	222		47,322	24

The currently reported positivity rate for Montgomery County is 24%.

Total Montgomery County Deaths (3/1/2020- 1/9/2021)- 50

Total North Carolina Deaths (3/1/2020- 1/9/2021)- 7,575

### **Surrounding Districts Response**

#### **Anson County Schools**

100% Remote until at least February 1<sup>st</sup>. The Anson County Board asked the Superintendent to make any adjustments needed with the Health Department's guidance for extending the date.

#### **Asheboro City Schools**

Plan B since October they have a Board meeting January 14<sup>th</sup> and expect to continue in Plan B.

#### **Davidson County Schools**

K-5 students are in plan A, 4-days per week. 6-12 students are in plan B, 2-days a week

#### **Lexington City Schools**

K-12 students are in plan B with a School Board meeting on January 12<sup>th</sup>

#### **Moore County Schools**

K-5 students are in plan A 5-days a week. 6-12 students are in plan B, 2-days a week. They will only change when staffing needs cannot be addressed.

#### **Randolph County Schools**

K-5 students are in plan A, 4-days a week. 6-12 students are in plan B, 2-days a week—no conversations of a change.

#### **Richmond County Schools**

100% remote through January 29<sup>th</sup>. They plan to monitor the numbers closely.

#### **Scotland County Schools**

100% remote through February.

#### **Stanly County Schools**

100% remote through January 18<sup>th</sup>. Beginning January 19<sup>th</sup>, Stanly County schools K-5 students will return in plan A 4-days a week, and 6-12 students on plan B reporting in person 2-days a week. They may meet as a board on Friday to discuss the plans.

After sharing the grim data for Montgomery County and plans of surrounding districts. Dr. Ellis turned the meeting over to the board for questions and discussions for the return of

school. Steve DeBerry asked about the availability of vaccines for staff. Dr. Ellis was told by the state the first round of vaccines should be available February 1, 2021. Second round should be available March 1, 2021. Bryan Dozier added that his employees are considered essential workers and have been delayed in receiving vaccines. Steve DeBerry shared requests from staff hoping to delay the return until they are able to receive both vaccines. Tommy Blake asked about the plans for implementation. Dr. Ellis stated that as of now the vaccines will be administered at the Garner Center in cohorts of 30 for employees that have submitted requests. Montgomery County Schools has offered sites and staff to help the already overwhelmed health department. Sandra Miller voiced her concern for the safety and staff and students and suggested to hold off on the return. Tommy Blake suggested the return be delayed until March 8, 2021 if vaccines are given on time. The board agreed that only a two-week delay would not be enough. Lynn Epps voiced her concerns for the CTE students' certifications and high school students with credit recovery issues. She advocated that we work on a case-by-case basis for those seniors who will not be able to make classes up. Steve DeBerry said that Mr. Hensley made a valid point for the CTE certification and suggested we work with parents who wish to allow their students to attend. Tommy Blake asked that we include teachers in the conversations. Dr. Ellis agreed we could give authority to those parents and teachers. Epps stated until our community steps up our children continue to lose out. Dr. Ellis stated that Jack Cagle and his team would work to track down those students who are in need. Bryan Dozier asked if the state has given any allowance for the school year to be extended into the summer. Dr. Ellis responded it will not be offered to those who have passed successfully. Our Summer Jumpstart program will be offered to those that are struggling. Hoping by summer this remediation can occur face-to-face.

The board debated the return of sports with Dr. Ellis's recommendation of the three-week halt of activities and sports. Steve DeBerry voiced his concern for athletes since basketball has already started. Taking this away from students now would be upsetting. Tommy Blake stated we need to live smart to live another day. Sandra Miller asked if we are proposing staff work from home. Dr. Ellis confirmed he is recommending staff working from home until this virus calms down. The board discussed their frustration without the cooperation of the community doing their part to slow the virus. Things are not likely to change anytime soon. Dr. Ellis stated to date we have only 300 of 500 employees signed up to receive the vaccine. We need more employees to sign up. Steve DeBerry asked for any thoughts or comments. Dr. Ellis confirmed with Cindy Taylor by phone of her agreement with the original three-week pause. Dr. Ellis made a recommendation that staff work Thursday and Friday this week and the pause of all activities including sports begin January 16 through February 7, 2021. Tommy Blake made a motion with Bryan Dozier seconding. Board member Lynn Epps advocated for the sports to continue as surrounding leagues are playing. Steve DeBerry agreed with Epps. Dr. Ellis asked if we should take athletics off the halt of activities. Epps stated this whole pandemic has been unfair and she wants to be a voice for these thirty students and asked if games could be made up? Jack Cagle was called upon and confirmed the schedules have already been abbreviated and could not be made up. Schools in our conference are already playing. Steve DeBerry asked Jack Cagle if we halt sports now would that take teams out of the playoffs. Cagle confirmed that it would affect playoffs. Dr. Ellis then asked the board if it was their wish to remove athletics from the halt. Steve DeBerry then asked for a motion. Tommy Blake made a motion with Bryan Dozier seconding. Tommy Blake asked were any coaches uncomfortable. Dr. Ellis stated that he has not heard any complaints from coaches. Steve DeBerry asked if there were any questions. Board member Bryan Dozier questioned what message are we sending if sports continue while classes stay remote. Sandra Miller asked if they were testing athletes. Dr. Ellis confirmed they are following CDC guidelines and temperature checks. Steve DeBerry voiced his concern that games can't be made up. Lynn Epps suggested that it is such a small number of students playing in the middle schools and those students have the option to play in other leagues. We could possibly take middle school out of the mix. Dr. Ellis again asked the board if they wish to include

athletics in the halt. Board members voiced they could see both sides but were torn. Steve DeBerry asked for a motion to remove athletics from the halt. Bryan Dozier questioned if the board has changed their minds about the message it would send. A student athlete asked to address the board and advocated for the mental health of students to continue sports for stress relief and scholarship opportunities. Lynn Epps made a motion that sports continue. Bryan Dozier stated that sometimes we have to protect people from themselves. Pandora Smith asked to address the board to carry on with sports with the exclusion of wrestling and to consider a COVID19 taskforce. Dr. Ellis suggested a compromise of continuing sports currently being played and halt any new sports until the virus is under control. Tommy Blake, Steve DeBerry, Lynn Epps agreed. Bryan Dozier stated it is not the best answer but he could live with it. Cindy Taylor agreed by phone. Dr. Ellis restated his recommendation of continuing sports currently being played and halt any new sports. Sandra Miller made a motion to approve with Tommy Blake seconding. The motion carried unanimously with the board. Dr. Ellis restated his recommendation to move the February 1 Board meeting to February 8, 2021. Bryan Dozier made a motion with Tommy Blake seconding. The motion carried unanimously with the board. Dr. Ellis restated his recommendation to bring students back March 8, 2021 with the caveat of researching the needs of CTE student certification for seniors. Lynn Epps made the motion with Sandra Miller seconding. The motion carried unanimously with the board.

Dr. Ellis asked the board for their thoughts of creating a COVID Taskforce. Members agreed. Dr. Ellis will consult the executive cabinet as not to burden the already overwhelmed health department.

Dr. Dale Ellis shared his thoughts for teachers. We have three primary responsibilities that we must adhere to when analyzing this decision making process. The first is our responsibility to educate our students. We have been doing that and doing it well for the most part. Obviously, it is not the same as face-to-face but we have taken this responsibility very seriously. There are factors in the online environment that do negatively impact the kids and we must acknowledge that. More importantly, our teachers must acknowledge that. You can't just give a kid a 0 because they didn't show up. What did you do to help that child? Did you call the child and talk to them and give them a 2-minute formative assessment and coach them on the day's lesson over the phone? If not, why not? Many teachers and staff members sent emails and letters to the administration and Board of Education regarding how to handle a possible return to school. I would say this to all teachers. Do not ask for, indeed beg for, flexibility, mercy, and justice from the leadership of this district if you are unwilling to provide it to your students. The struggles of students and parents also cry out for the exact things that you have naturally expected to receive in all this. We must continue to do EVERYTHING that we humanly can do to ensure the success of our students.

The second responsibility we have is to make sure we can keep students safe. We have tried to do that with sports as one example. However, we cannot watch the kids 24 hours a day. We had an outbreak that led to the cancelling out of the playoffs in one of our sports. We talked to a number of districts in our research who said they would rather have the kids in school so they can wear a mask. What about the 16-17 hours a day they aren't at school? Wearing a mask at school does nothing if we assimilate back into the community after school hours without a mask. How do we keep anyone safe when this virus is ravaging our community? I was offered an analogy today that I tend to agree with. Why do we cancel school when there is a threat of bad weather? To keep kids safe. Most other businesses will stay open while schools close. That is because we have an absolute responsibility to keep kids safe and we cannot guarantee that when there is ice and snow on the road. I would submit that this virus provides the same challenge in that we cannot guarantee our student's safety at this time.

Our third responsibility is to keep our staff safe. Just as we cannot guarantee student safety right now due to the community spread of this virus, we cannot guarantee staff safety either. While we can provide a free and appropriate public education through online channels, we cannot overcome the safety concerns right now. How can I tell our teacher that just lost her 35-year old husband that everything is going to be ok? In short, I can't. It is my opinion that the state needs to shut down and focus on what has been, to date, a disappointing vaccination roll out. I think it has become clear that economic and political forces currently outweigh the safety of our state's residents. While we can do nothing to combat the virus statewide, we can do something to try and help in our community. That is why we have taken the actions that we did tonight. To do our part to protect the community. I have no doubt that I will receive calls tomorrow cursing me and these actions. I can only say that I made the recommendations that I thought were right. If you truly want our kids to be back in our school buildings, the best way to get us there is through wearing a mask and taking other appropriate actions to help mitigate the spread of this awful virus in our community.

Chairman DeBerry asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Tommy Blake made a motion with a second by Bryan Dozier, the meeting was duly adjourned.

The next regular meeting will be held Monday, February 8, 2021 at 6:30 pm at the Montgomery Central High School Auditorium.

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Steven W. DeBerry, Chairman

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Dale Ellis, Ed. D., Secretary