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OCS BOARD APPROVES OCTOBER RETURN FOR PRESCHOOL AND EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

The Orange County Board of Education approved the return to school for preschool and exceptional children on October 27, 2020.

After a series of motions, it was decided at the September 29 meeting for all Exceptional Children (EC) self-contained students and preschool students to return for the start of the second nine weeks (October 27); small groups of students in all remaining grades will return Under Plan B with the start of the second semester (in January 2021).

The two action items on the agenda were the reopening of schools under Plan B and a consideration for staff to return to work to become familiar with new safety protocols and procedures, and to get acclimated to being back in the classroom.

Staff may bring their school-aged children to work, as long as they adhere to safety protocols with fidelity and are not a disruption that would keep their parents from performing their duties. (Details will be worked out with the principal.)

These decisions came after the culmination of two back-to-back meetings regarding the issue - one on September 28 and tonight's meeting. At this evening's meeting, the Board heard from a panel of experts on COVID-19, dug deeper into data from the Superintendent's Extended Cabinet, and asked robust questions. Detailed discussions among members and school leaders framed the Board's decision about plans to return to school under options for Plan B which would allow a gradual return for students and staff.

Plan B was presented as a hybrid model including both in-person and 100% remote (online) learning. OCS Superintendent Dr. Monique Felder presented options at the elementary, middle, and high school levels for the Board to consider regarding Plan B. These options were developed by principals who lead the respective grade levels, and also took into consideration the groups of students who are most in need of returning to in-person learning, for example, EC students, those enrolled in CTE courses and our youngest students in OCS.

Dr. Felder's recommendation was also developed with the assistance of health experts, guidance from other districts that are open under a B plan, and input to date from staff and family surveys.

The Board considered both how to move forward after the first nine weeks in 2020-2021, as well as the possibility of staff returning to work.

The panel of health experts tonight included:

- Dr. Danny Benjamin, Kiser-Arena Distinguished Professor of Pediatrics, Duke University; Chair, Pediatric Trials Network; and Deputy Director, Duke Clinical Research Institute

- Ms. Quintana Stewart, Director, Orange County Health Department
- Ms. Rebecca Crawford, Finance & Administrative Operations Director, Orange County Health Department
- Dr. Ashley Ward, Senior Policy Associate, Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions, Duke University
- Ms. Melanie Wilson, Geographic Information System Analyst, CSC Information Technology and Services

The Board's questions tonight included topics such as a vaccine for COVID-19, testing for the virus, risks associated with athletics, and factors that might cause a shift in the metrics.

OCS administrators also provided detailed data to the Board in advance of the meeting as supplemental information on several reports: SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) survey results; Exact Path diagnostic assessments (which are benchmarks on Reading, Math, and Language Arts); a report on the first quarter F & D grades of ninth graders; attendance for the first nine weeks by subgroup; a report on student engagement in Canvas; and staff who are high-risk and might seek remote working options.

The Monday work session <link to video> featured a series of additional presentations to help the board make an informed decision. Topics from Monday included: a presentation by the ABC Science Collaborative; results from staff and family surveys to date; an update and recommendation from the OCS Metrics Monitoring Task Force; and details from the OCS Plan B Readiness Matrix.