



For Immediate Release

July 21, 2020

Surry County Board of Education Makes Important Decisions for Return to Learn and Graduation

Dobson, NC — The Surry County Board of Education held a special called meeting yesterday to discuss options for a safe return to learn for all students and staff for the 2020-2021 school year. Mrs. Samantha Ange, Surry County Public Health Director presented local health information and metrics for the Board’s consideration when making such an important decision. After much heartfelt discussion, the Surry County Board of Education approved a plan to return to learn on August 17 for students with remote instruction and will reconsider face-to-face instructional options with a goal of September 21, 2020. The first week of school for students, the week of August 17th will be an orientation week for teachers to connect with students and families individually to build relationships. The orientation sessions will also enable teachers to communicate expectations for remote learning and to provide students with needed materials and supplies such as Chromebooks.

The discussion during the meeting stemmed largely from the need to balance students having high-quality instruction while also being safe. The Board considered the metrics Mrs. Ange provided indicating:

- Surry County is currently seeing an increase in new cases daily,
- 16% of positive cases in Surry County are currently from ages birth to 19 years of age,
- 50% of Surry County residents currently testing positive for COVID-19 are asymptomatic, and
- the health department is seeing a trend in positive cases of COVID-19 as the result of mass gatherings in family units or outside cluster groups, especially among groups not masking.

Ultimately, the Surry County Board of Education elected to base its decision on the health, safety, and well-being of all students and staff. At such time as the Board revisits the decision to consider face-to-face instruction, the Board will review detailed plans outlined for a blended possibility of options for all students and families. Surry County Schools is committed to ensuring all students and staff have safe schools and safe spaces to return to learn with a number of options to meet all student needs.

“I often say, ‘Together We Are Stronger’, and today I am so proud of our employees and what we’ve done together to meet the needs of all students and staff since March. We have to provide accountability measures for all of our students. These are tough times,” stated Superintendent, Dr. Travis L. Reeves. “I commend the Surry County Board of Education for coming together and listening to all of these complex needs, and I appreciate the way the Board has handled this. There is no playbook for a pandemic. I also

appreciate my Surry County Schools colleagues, and the partnership of parents to deliver the best education possible regardless of the situation. We are going to do our very best to continue to meet the needs of our students every day.”

In other news, the Board of Education made a decision to allow high schools to finalize graduation plans for the Class of 2020 graduates. Surry County Schools surveyed seniors before the end of the school year and the overwhelming response was to delay graduation with the hopes of a more traditional ceremony. When Governor Roy Cooper announced that North Carolina would remain under phase two restrictions last week, graduation plans had to be reconsidered. With graduation ceremonies a few weeks away, Surry County Schools again surveyed Class of 2020 graduates about their wishes for graduation, with the majority of graduates who responded selecting small group graduation ceremonies with live stream coverage for parents and other spectators.

Director of Public Health, Mrs. Samantha Ange provided additional guidance and clarification about mass gatherings during the well-attended board meeting. This guidance enables schools to provide a whole class graduation ceremony for all graduates and limited staff but does not allow for spectators. After much discussion and input from high school principals, the Surry County Board of Education approved a motion to allow schools to plan graduation ceremonies based on the available options, in accordance with enhanced safety protocols, and based on the graduates’ wishes.

Graduation ceremonies are scheduled as follows:

- Surry Early College High School on Wednesday, July 29 at 9:00 am
- Surry Central High School on Thursday, July 30 at 9:00 am
- East Surry High School on Friday, July 31 at 9:00 am
- North Surry High School on Saturday, August 1 at 9:00 am

More details will be shared with graduates and their families through personalized messaging as each school’s graduation may not look exactly the same. High school principals will be able to work with their graduates to finalize graduation plans in accordance with their wishes.

Superintendent, Travis L. Reeves stated, “We have worked very hard to preserve graduation and have a ceremony that is memorable because the high school diploma is so important. We want to recognize graduates and their peers. It is extremely important for us to honor graduates but we also want to be safe. I appreciate the work of our high school principals to ensure graduates have an opportunity to celebrate this important milestone in meaningful ways.”

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