

Randolph elementary schools move to four days

Wednesday will remain remote learning day

BY DANIEL KENNEDY

RANDOLPH COUNTY — After a discussion last week about elementary school students returning to campus full time, the Randolph County Schools Board of Education reconvened this week and ultimately determined a four-day week is necessary.

Board members voted 6-1 to bring all of the county's youngest students back to classrooms for all weekdays but Wednesday, the system's lone remote day. Stephen Gainey, RCSS superintendent, requested that the school board not lose the momentum he believes teachers, administrators and other staff members have built.

Gainey said he wishes to see fatigued teachers maintain the one day they've had midweek for planning purposes, but also did not want to see students return home full time in the face of four schools county-wide having reported COVID-19 issues since August. Even as health officials warn of an influx in case numbers and parents desire more days of school, Gainey remained steadfast with what he was asking, recommending the county stay with an A-B schedule or go to four days per week for all students with one remote day.

"So here is my recommendation," Gainey said. "Do not bring students in grades pre-K through fifth for five days a week. It's too much, too early."

The superintendent said he understands the need for students

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to maintain days of classroom instruction. He also acknowledged the desire of parents to regain some semblance of a routine, and that some area employers have developed an understanding of sorts that Wednesday is a standard day of remote instruction.

All of these considerations factored into the superintendent's recommendation and the board's decision. They also came after Susan Hayes, Randolph County health director, explained to the board at its request for her input that Randolph's case numbers are on the rise.

"There are hotspots across the county," Hayes said. "Those hotspots are in the Randleman area; the Archdale-Trinity area

is a big hotspot; the southwest, southeast [parts of the county], all of those areas are considered hotspots right now."

Hayes continued by saying that younger demographics are affected at different rates than the older students, making it imperative the board consider students, faculty, administrators and other community members in their decisions. The county, she cautioned, is not trending in the right direction.

"We all know that children are less likely to spread coronavirus than adults," Hayes said. "They typically have mild-to-moderate symptoms. When you look at the number of cases that we've had, we've had far more adults than children. That, in and of itself, is a positive thing. But if you ask me if we're in a situation right now where our cases are increasing, I would tell you yes.

"We're in a higher-risk situation right now, as are a number

of other counties across North Carolina, as well as a number of states."

Gainey said he had never had to wrestle with a problem of this magnitude and complexity in his 28 years working in education. He maintains that schools in Randolph County are taking the proper precautions to continue to build the system's schedule safely, even as he acknowledges the concerns some parents have that students are in school too little or too much.

"Moms and dads need to get back to work — I get it," Gainey said. "Numbers rising aren't a reason to not try to move forward, if we can do it safely. I'm not going to do anything that's going to jeopardize someone else's safety."

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