



Photo by Daniel Kennedy

After reported cases of COVID-19 surfaced at schools in the Archdale-Trinity area, including at Trindale Elementary, Randolph County Schools implemented predetermined protocols in August and September. At the county's school board meeting Monday, the board approved full five-day instructional weeks for elementary schools beginning Oct. 12.

Randolph elementary schools cleared for return

BY DANIEL KENNEDY

RANDOLPH COUNTY — Choices for parents of elementary school children in Randolph County shifted this week.

With the announcement by Gov. Roy Cooper that grades K-5 are free to return in October to a five-day-per-week schedule, Randolph County cleared the way for its schools to return to campus.

The RCSS Board of Education approved by a 4-3 vote a plan that will open elementary schools throughout the county five days a week starting Oct. 19.

"I would like some more time," RCSS Superintendent Stephen Gainey said. "I think the 19th would be better than the 12th. ... Doing the right thing by our kids is taking more time to get the K-5 kids there. Whatever this board decides, we're going to get behind wholeheartedly as a staff, but if we're going to get them more than what they're doing right now, we don't have to be the first one to the show."

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Several board members expressed the notion that getting kids into classrooms was the top priority. By that token, a motion was made and seconded to have elementary schools open five days a week beginning Oct. 19.

Board members Matthew Lambeth, Todd Cutler, Brian Biggs and Sharon Farlow voted in favor of the measure. Chairman Gary Cook, Fred Burgess and Tracy Boyles voted against it.

After he was initially asked whether schools could be ready to return to a full schedule Oct. 12, Gainey

said he'd like to have more time.

"It is going to take several weeks to get bus routes ready," Gainey said. "It is going to take several weeks to reorganize school nutrition and get ready to serve more meals."

Gov. Roy Cooper announced a plan earlier this month that will allow school districts in North Carolina an opportunity to bring elementary school students back full time for classes on campus in October. The announcement left systems across the state with the decision of whether it is safe to bring the youngest of students back on campus. Oct.

5 is the first day that public elementary schools can begin to return to Plan A.

Randolph County is currently operating within the parameters of Plan B, which offers a hybrid option for students to be in the classroom for two days and learning remotely for three. Plan C offers remote/online instruction district-wide.

Meanwhile, for the schools planning to return to Plan A when cleared, no capacity restrictions will be in place. As many students as were in classrooms prior to the COVID-19 outbreak in mid-March will be allowed to return in October.

New safety measures will remain in place, with daily temperature checks and health screenings required to enter school buildings. Face coverings are also here to stay, and they will continue to be the student's ticket onto the school bus.

Cooper and Dr. Mandy Cohen, secretary of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human

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Services, presented the plan for a return to Plan A as a response to the stabilization of metrics around the state. Cohen said more residents have adhered to wearing face coverings, resulting in the improvement.

According to Cohen, younger children are at a lower risk of transmitting the virus than older children.

Hence, it is the younger students who will return to campus full time first. According to Gainey, an exclusively remote online option is still in the works.

“The governor did not specifically address remote instruction, but it is the intent of the state that we have it for any child who is not comfortable coming back,” Gainey said.

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