

**Open Work Session
Quarterly Session with Wicomico County Board of Education
September 21, 2021**

Dr. Donna Hanlin, Superintendent; Dr. Micah Stauffer, Chief Finance and Operations Officer; and Mr. Gene Malone, Chairman of the Board of Education, came before Council. Mr. Malone introduced Board members in the audience – Mr. John Palmer, Mr. Donald Fitzgerald, Ms. Tonya Laird-Lewis, Ms. Anne Suthowski, and Mr. Mike Miller. Dr. Hanlin introduced staff members in the audience – Mrs. Kim Miles, Assistant Superintendent for Student and Family Service, and Dr. Rick Briggs, Chief Academic Officer.

Dr. Hanlin said they will address the agenda items the best they can based on what was provided to them.

Kirwan Update and Accountability and Implementation Board

Dr. Hanlin said Dr. Stauffer, who is the Kirwan Coordinator, will update Council on this topic. Dr. Stauffer said they had one meeting of Blueprint Coordinators across the state, and they have also been getting updates in the CFO meetings on a monthly basis. He said, as far as the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB), they will be responsible for the implementation and evaluation of the outcome under the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. He said the AIB has very broad oversight of funding and accountability, including the ability to withhold funding based on the implementation of the Blueprint elements, as well as student performance. He said, as for the status of the AIB currently, the nominating committee at the state level has selected nine individuals to move on for the Governor to appoint seven of them. He said the legislation requires the Governor to make his selection by October 1, but he has expressed concern because eight of the nine nominees are from Montgomery County, Baltimore County or Baltimore City, and one is from Anne Arundel. He said Governor Hogan has asked the nominating committee to resend him nine names that are more representative of Maryland both demographically and geographically by September 27.

Mrs. Acle asked if they have nominated anyone from the Eastern Shore, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, he is not aware of anyone.

Mr. Cannon suggested, maybe the reason for those individuals is that no one in other areas applied, to which Dr. Hanlin responded, she does not recall the full list of nominees, only those who made it to that level. Mr. Cannon asked if there were any particular requirements of the people appointed, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, he is not sure. He said he knows they sent out a posting for those who were interested in applying to be considered, but he is not sure of the requirements of the posting.

Mrs. Acle asked Dr. Stauffer to forward the posting to the Councilmembers so, if they are still accepting nominations, they can send it.

Mr. Cannon asked if there were any changes as far as the code that moved the deadlines, the obligations, and the costs forward, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, he would like to just talk about Kirwan and the Blueprint in general for a couple of minutes.

Dr. Stauffer said, after the AIB is selected, the plan is to create a comprehensive implementation plan for Maryland by February 15, and at that point the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) shall develop the guideline for criteria for the approval of all the local county plans by the local boards, which

has to be done by April 1. He said those plans will then go to MSDE for review and recommendation of approval by June 15, 2022, and the AIB will ultimately have the approval of those plans. He said, when they are talking about the funding, the AIB has the authority to withhold funding if plans have not been approved by the timeline set forth. Dr. Stauffer said 25 percent of the increase in the state share of the Blueprint funding for each fiscal year is going to be withheld from the school systems in that amount in fiscal years 23 through 25, so that will hinge on those planning approvals, and then beyond fiscal year 25 it will hinge on the student performance data itself.

Dr. Stauffer said the other pieces of this are early childhood education and the education career ladder. He said early childhood education is going to be an expansion of full-day pre-k and kindergarten, and they have already been moving in that direction, so Wicomico looks really good right now. He said they will be working with local private daycares as well, which is part of the stipulation under Blueprint.

Dr. Stauffer said the County Boards of Education must implement a career ladder by July 1, 2024, which of course is subject to negotiations and bargaining under that law between 2019 and 2024. He said the salary scale for teachers must increase by 10 percent, and effective July 1, 2026 the starting teacher's salary must be at least \$60,000. He said, in addition, the career ladder has to also define compensation for certificated teachers, master's degrees, national board certifications, and different levels for administrators with education certifications as well.

Dr. Stauffer said those things all have to be done in the next few years under Blueprint, and they are working diligently at this point in time on college and career readiness, which has been a focus of the County for several years under Dr. Hanlin's leadership. He said they are sitting in a good place with that, but they need to have pathways in place for career readiness as well as AP courses, early college, dual enrollment, and CTE, and they know those are all things within the county they prioritize to begin with.

School Enrollment and Attendance

Dr. Hanlin said they were not sure exactly what Council is looking for, but they have provided a little bit of information as to where they are right now. She explained, official enrollment is not official until after September 30, but they are keeping a very close eye on it and they are pleased that they are seeing a bounce back in reenrollment, especially in the primary grades.

Ms. Kim Miles came before Council. Mrs. Acle said there were specific questions Council had asked the last time the BOE met with the Council on attendance and how many students were enrolled. She clarified, she cannot exactly recall what the questions were, but they were going to get back to the Council. Ms. Miles responded, she does not recall the specifics, but she would be happy to revisit the data if that is what is requested. She said she can tell them how many kids they have lost to the private school system, and they know the number of withdrawals. She said she recalls the conversation, but she does not recall the data in the manner of specificity that it is being requested. She said thinks there was a question on how many students had transitioned to homeschooling, and how many transitioned to private schools, but they did not have the disaggregated data at that point in time physically in front of Council. She said she can look at the coding in the student database to see how many students are in homeschool and how many transitioned away from them in a year, and she is not prepared with that information today, but certainly it is something they can look at.

Dr. Hanlin clarified, does Council want the number of students who transitioned to homeschool and to private schools, to which Mrs. Acle responded, she will look back at the last meeting minutes and email them to Dr. Hanlin.

Mr. Dodd said he thought at the last meeting it was stated that they found all of the students who were lost and the ones who transitioned to a private school. He then asked if those students came back, to which Ms. Miles responded, they will not have the actual numbers until the September 30 information is released. She said they have students currently coming and leaving the schools, so they will continue to monitor that data. Ms. Miles said Mr. Dodd is referencing the students who they were not sure where they were, and they had some students whose attendance was showing that they were not engaging, and they were able to locate those students. She clarified, she cannot say that all of them from a point in time or location started attending regularly. She said she would like to be able to say that, but that would not be the case. She said the school counselors, student advisors, people personnel workers, and home school liaisons work as an attendance team and continue to communicate with families to find out what needs there may be that are impending the student's attendance, and to engage all resources available. She said they have increased the number of people personnel workers, which through COMAR are those who are charged with attendance specifically, as well as continue the roles of the homeschool liaison student advisors and counselors with emphasis on ensuring the attendance of the students. She said it is ongoing and very fine-tuned work that is done to not only identify a student not attending, but to find out what the reasons are behind that to address those and, if there is support that can be provided to take away that barrier that may or may not be present, to do that as well.

Teacher Retention

Dr. Hanlin said she thinks Council knows that teacher retention and having a high-quality workforce is one of their strategic priorities. She said they keep a very close eye on turnover rate, the three-year turnover rate, as well as the actual goal in the strategic plan, which is the percentage of first-year teachers who stay with them. She said last year was a little bit challenging, and in the 2020-2021 school year they lost a few teachers, but the goal is to stay at about 90 percent, and they are just under that goal. She said, in 2017-2018 they were at 89 percent, and then in 2019-2020 the data shows 86 percent, so it is obviously an important goal to have a stable workforce. She said it is important for professional development, teachers being familiar with the school system, and being familiar in the classroom. She said they hired about 126 new teachers this year, which is little higher than normal, as it is usually a little over 100. Mr. Dodd asked if those were replacements, or added positions, to which Dr. Hanlin responded, they did not add any positions except contractual positions, or positions that were added through the ESSER funds or some other grant funding. She explained, for example, they added social workers with some of the grant funding, so some of the 126 could be those additional social workers.

American Rescue Plan Funding

Dr. Stauffer said they received the initial approval of the grant application, and he would like to advertise that the grant application in full is on the homepage of their website, but they are waiting on the official notice of grant award at this point in time. He said they expect to have that very soon, hopefully in the next couple of weeks, and once that funding is received it has to be spent by September 30, 2024. He said some of the amounts in the budget currently for use of that funding are \$3.4 million in wages for tutoring, home hospital, after school programs, summer school, and literacy camps. He said there is approximately \$2.9 million for student and teacher laptops, as well as for virtual learning instructional spaces for high schools. He said there is \$7.7 million in instructional software, and a little

over a million for the creation and development of outdoor classrooms and playground equipment. He said the bulk of that money would be used for the HVAC system updates throughout the county, as well as door and window replacements throughout the county, and there is approximately \$30 million earmarked for that purpose.

Mr. Dodd said they should not hear a complaint about air-conditioning again, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, they hope not. He said they think by the end of this funding in 2024 they will be where they need to be according to the CIP and the facility condition assessments, so hopefully it will put them very close to the CIP priority list in the back of the book. Mr. Dodd asked if Wi-Hi is fully air-conditioned, including the auditorium, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, yes. Mr. Dodd said he remembers a time that it was not, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, he remembers that as well, as he graduated from Wi-Hi.

Mr. Dodd asked Dr. Stauffer to talk about the outdoor classrooms, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, the outdoor classrooms were just something in the development of the grant application that they saw as a need as it was a reoccurring theme from school to school and administration to administration, so they want to do their best to provide an outdoor learning space that could be utilized throughout, not only for environmental learning, but as a space that students could go to for learning.

Dr. Stauffer said much of the playground equipment is dated, and this will provide the opportunity to make sure they replace it with safe and updated equipment.

Mr. Cannon asked how they are implementing funding for broadband related projects. He clarified, part of the funding is for the laptops they are talking about, but what else can be done to stay ahead of things, especially with students who may still be at home, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, a lot of that is hotspot funding, which is included in the technology numbers he just went over and helps the connectivity with students at home.

Social Media Policy

Mrs. Acle said she is curious what their media policy is. She then asked if there is a social media or media policy, to which Dr. Hanlin responded, they have a social media policy as far as teachers participating on social media and communication with students. Mrs. Acle said she noticed on a social media page that they get edited. She clarified, on the Wicomico County Public Schools social media, if someone posts something that is not nice or in agreement with the picture, they are deleted, to which Dr. Hanlin responded, she is not familiar with that matter. Mr. Malone then suggested Mrs. Acle ask Mr. Butler about it. Mrs. Acle then asked, what is their policy? She clarified, she is sure they have all seen it and heard on the news about the pictures that were sent to the media from the Communications Department of parents, and it looks like some of Dr. Hanlin's staff too, to which Dr. Hanlin responded, she is familiar with a picture Mr. Butler provided to WBOC because they asked for a picture. She said they asked either the night of the meeting or the morning after the meeting, and it is a public meeting.

Mr. Cannon asked what this is in reference to, to which Mrs. Acle responded, it was a picture she was in, and there were some citizens in it. She said, from WBOC, she was told it was released from Wicomico County Public Schools in regards to parents protesting masks, and she did not have a mask on during that time. She said there was also a narrative submitted, to which Dr. Hanlin responded, she is just familiar with a picture, and it is common practice. She explained, if she does an interview, for instance, with Greg Bassett, they will send pictures to the media to support the stories, so they were doing as they have done before. She said WBOC reached out to Mr. Butler and asked for a picture from that

night, and Mr. Butler sent the picture he had. Mrs. Acle asked is it normal for them to send something with a negative connotation, as it should it be something positive. Mr. Cannon asked what the negative inference was, as he is not understanding any of this, to which Mrs. Acle responded, it was saying that parents were protesting masks and they were aggressive, and they had their own narrative to the picture. She said Mr. Butler was acting as the Communications Director in the Public School System, and WBOC was also at the meeting. Mr. Cannon clarified, the statement was that the parents were on school property and not wearing masks, to which Mrs. Acle responded, they were doing a protest.

Dr. Hanlin explained, there was an issue because there is now a state requirement in all public schools and school facilities that individuals are required to wear a mask. She said they had set up the scenario where they were going to allow people to come into the meeting and speak in a very structured way allowing five people at a time based upon the space they had in the auditorium, nine people in the lobby, and five people rotating out, so it was very methodical. She said what happened was that a crowd came in without masks on and refused to leave, and they had to shut the meeting down because they could not open the meeting in that situation.

Mrs. Acle asked, what about those who went to talk about other things and were denied, to which Dr. Hanlin responded, the meeting had not been opened. Mrs. Acle clarified that the meeting was not opened to anyone, everyone was denied to go to the meeting.

Mr. Cannon asked Mrs. Acle if she was denied period, or was she denied because she did not have on a mask, to which Mr. Malone responded, they were denied because they were not wearing masks. Mrs. Acle said she put her mask on and citizens who put their masks on were not allowed to go into the meeting, to which Dr. Hanlin responded, they could not open the meeting. Mr. Cannon said he thought the picture showed everyone without a mask on, to which Mr. Malone responded, that picture was taken of the lobby because they never opened the doors to the meeting. Mrs. Acle said Mr. Butler came out and asked everyone to put their masks on, which she was not paying attention to what the people around her were doing, but she put her mask on so she could go into the meeting to make public comments. She said she and three other people she was with had masks on, but they were denied, so they were not able to make public comments. Mr. Cannon said it sounds to him that everything got out of control, and rather than allow it to escalate, the meeting was not opened, to which Mr. Malone responded, it was about safety. Mrs. Acle said there was not any escalating of it, except Mr. Butler's narrative of what was happening, but WBOC was at the meeting. She said she does not understand why Mr. Butler submitted the picture to WBOC with a specific narrative, to which Dr. Hanlin responded, she understood that WBOC was not there. Mrs. Acle said she was in the lobby and saw them there, to which Mr. Malone responded, he cannot say that Mr. Butler delivered the narrative. He clarified, he is aware that he sent the picture, but he does not know about the narrative as he cannot validate that, he just knows the picture was sent.

Mr. Dodd asked for clarification on the 180 days, as he knows the school year is 180 days, to which Dr. Hanlin responded, it is calendar days. Mr. Dodd asked if that includes weekends, to which Dr. Hanlin responded, correct. Mr. Malone added, they could release it earlier based on transmission rate. He said they will be reporting the data, so if it gets in the level of their wheelhouse, they will.

Mr. Holloway said he had a citizen send him an email questioning the policy on paying fines for drivers who are driving county cars. He then asked if that is a practice they have, to which Dr. Hanlin responded, they pay their own fines, but it does go through their workflow system if they are in a county vehicle. She explained, if they are fined, it goes through the workflow system and then they reimburse the

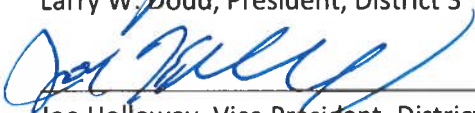
workflow system, so they pay their own fines, to which Mr. Holloway responded, so the employee always reimburses them.

Mr. Dodd said they look forward to the tour of the new Beaver Run School on October 5.

There was no further discussion.



Larry W. Dodd, President, District 3



Joe Holloway, Vice President, District 5



John T. Cannon, At-Large

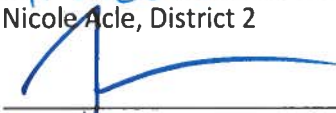
absent

William R. McCain, At-Large

Ernest F. Davis, District 1



Nicole Acle, District 2



Josh Hastings, District 4



Laura Hurley, Council Administrator