

Thank you to the school board and Dr. McDaris for your hard and thoughtful work. Please vote Plan C for at least 6 weeks and then we can reevaluate at that time. Please share that teachers are very hard at work learning new platforms, creating new and engaging lessons and planning a LOT for robust remote learning.

Respectfully yours,

Carolyn Smith
PFE music teacher

Hello again and apologies, I don't know your first name.

I understand the school board is still considering options for how to reopen. I would like to reiterate my strong support for virtual school only. Confirmed cases in Transylvania County are rising fast as everyone is aware and an all virtual beginning period is the only option that fully protects the health and safety of teachers, staff, and students.

I think specifically of two scenarios:

1. A student contracts the virus and infects a teacher or staff member who subsequently dies as a result. This is disastrous for everyone involved.

2. One of my three children enrolled at Brevard Elementary is currently diagnosed with childhood asthma. If he were to contract the virus and suffer lifelong effects as a result, how can I answer him when he asks how I could have possibly sent him to school during a spreading, escalating pandemic?

Please start schools virtual only until we know more.

Thanks
Christopher Reeves

Dear Ms. Hunter and member of the Transylvania County Board of Education:

My name is Katherine Crawford. My husband and I have two young daughters who are students in the TCS system: one entering 6th grade at Brevard Middle School, and one entering 2nd grade at Brevard Elementary School. We have proud members of the Brevard Elementary School family for the past six years, where our daughters have thrived. We fully support, and in fact, adore, BES and its dedicated educators.

Like so many in our school community, we waited with baited breath to hear the Board's decision on July 20th. Now that this decision has been delayed until July 27th, our concerns--and worries--have grown by leaps and bounds when considering just how Covid-19 continues to negatively affect our community, our children, and the teachers, staff, and administrators who are our friends and family.

Since the beginning of this process my husband and I have wanted to support our schools and whatever decision was made. We have placed our trust in TCS time and again. Our daughters love school, want to be in school, and ask to be in school every day. They miss their teachers, friends, and the dynamic learning environment of which they have come to love being a part. My rising 6th grader wants nothing more than to begin her middle school career at school with her friends and new teachers.

However, we need more time. The science reveals new concerns every day. Teachers, staff, and administrators need more time to make in-person learning safer for everyone involved, let alone dynamic and useful for our student learners. Positive Covid-19 cases are exploding in our county and minutes away in South Carolina. We are scared. We are beginning to feel that it is simply not safe to send our children back to school, not for them and not for their teachers--not yet. Please consider starting all TCS on a virtual start this Fall, with the option to open safely at a later date. Please vote to keep ALL of us safe.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Katherine S. Crawford
TCS parent
Brevard, NC

I am a Transylvania County Resident, and a retired Kindergarten Teacher. I appreciate the time and effort you are putting into decisions regarding the health and safety of our students. I support plan C, virtual learning until the science indicates that the virus is abating, and it is safe for all to return. This includes students, administrative staff, custodians, cafeteria staff and bus drivers. Thank you for serving our community and schools.

Betty Anderson

Dear State Legislator, Local School Board Members, School District Staff, County Commissioners and Superintendent of Public Instructions,

I am writing to you to express my deep concern that as proposed, all three public school instructional reopening schools choices in the time of Covid-19 are equally bad choices. First off, I would like to request that our state legislators advocate and push for a 2-week delay to the school year. I believe the circumstances warrant it and I also believe that an additional 14 days can make all the difference between a haphazard and an orderly start. School administrators, educators and staff will need this time to literally role-play their way through a week's worth of in-classroom instructions as well as remote learning to trouble-shoot and finalize restrictions, rules etc. Since we - the adults in the room - frittered away valuable time since mid-March, arguing over masks, infection rates, PPP and whether bars and fitness clubs should be open, it is incumbent that we now seriously focus on how we can safely - truly safely, not some hope-for-the-best kind of safely - reopen our schools. Additional time will translate to additional safety for educators, staff, and students. As a public school parent, I will not stand for policy forcing our children and our children's teachers to be the next line of frontline workers in the face of a very real and largely still not very well understood deadly health threat. If you think about the largeness of the risk, a 14-day delay seems like a small price to pay.

I am reading European studies that are looking at potential long-term health consequences in young asymptomatic carriers of Covid-19. The answers are outstanding and that is unsettling. As the parent of a 13-year-old boy on the autism spectrum and as the daughter of a woman, who remembered two students not returning after summer break due to polio, I am not willing to submit my son to what can best be described as a public health experiment with no controls in place. It is my question to you as state legislators, how you will protect school districts' from potential litigation if outbreaks are traced to in-school learning and deaths can be associated with it. My own school district is a high-quality place of public learning. A district I associate with making the best decisions that can be made under the continuous and sustained threat of cuts to funding. As a parent of a child, who will always depend on public school for his academic success - few private school would accept my son, because of his disability nor would they be able to educate him to the level public school can - I depend on my district's leaders wisdom, but I am concerned to see that in the very outside-of-any-norm runup to the fall/winter semester, the only clearly-formulated marching orders they have received is to open schools. Beyond that there is little clarity as to how to pay for it all and how to safely accomplish that and how to make up for potential loss in student numbers. Teachers are terrified, I have talked to as many as I can, and I believe the fright and rightfully so. The buck stops with our state's elected officials and I would like to ask you to make supplemental public school funding a priority. Please act and act quickly.

At my district's last board meeting, basic questions such as where - at the bus stop or at the entrance to school? - temperature checks would be performed. This left myself and countless other parents, as well as teachers, breathless with panic in the days since watching the zoom meeting (I will not comment on the irony of that). In 21 days, I'm supposed to let my child go indoors with other students and overwhelmed teachers, trying to perform a very complex job in an entirely different and endlessly confusing environment. I don't know who can tell me with a straight face that this can be accomplished with great outcomes and whomever does, be warned - my reaction will swing somewhere between the extremes of high-anxiety laughter and complete loss of words.

I would like for our school district leaders to take a serious look - with two extra weeks at your disposal - to explore loop teaching, leaving students and teachers in the relationships they

formed before Covid-19 brought public learning to an unceremonious end, as well as build out a robust and realistic Plan C that enables parents to step in and facilitate remote learning that will reasonably get our state's pupils through the fall and winter with a good chance to catch up on electives, school sports etc. after the health threat has either waned or is under control. I believe that technology can be stretched much farther than we have - as most of you have discovered, a lot is possible via zoom with a white board and some markers - and that some high-risk educators, if deputized, could come up with Plan C education plans that wouldn't feel like a distant third best, as it currently does.

I urge our district leaders to work for a realistic and robust Plan C, and make Plan B the opt-in choice for students identified who need in-class instructions. Taking some children out of the equation will allow students, teachers and staff to space out more safely in physical buildings, it will mean fewer hands touching high-touch surfaces, it will even at its worst slow down the spread and make it easier to track and control. Students, who lack a home environment conducive to remote learning, solid Wif-Fi, as well students with working full-time parents and students with special needs, could be grouped into smaller pods, taught in cafeterias and gyms, by teachers, identified as low-risk, who may prefer to teach in this environment, as long as it can be controlled for potential transmission of all kinds of viruses and germs. Yes, students may be separated along socio-economic lines, but ideally, it won't be forever, and perhaps creating smaller class sizes with less distracted and panicked teachers will lead to better learning outcomes for those attending in-school classes. Likewise, a robust remote learning module, would attract a certain group of parents back to public school for its flexibility and self-paced freedom of choice, along with increased sense of safety. I would urge our district's staff to review and par down the remote Plan C expectations. Most parents, even under the most ideal of circumstances, will not be able to corale fifth and sixth grade students to independently sit in front of a computer for 6 hours, or worse, have to sit with them. I am expecting a solid core curriculum for this fall/winter semester if we as a family opt for Plan C, nothing more and nothing less. Anything longer than three hours of screen time, will divert many parents to alternative homeschooling options.

Many questions remain to be hammered out. Extra time is of the essence. Courage and bold out-of-the-box thinking is in high demand as our state and individual districts come up with workable options. I'm sure you have already been told by countless others that a bad economy can be revived, but lives can't. I would like to add to that that the lives of our next generation and our seasoned public educators are more valuable than anything that has a dollar sign in front of it.

I am a deeply concerned parent. I ask you to give my letter and all the others you are receiving, serious thought and make the best possible decision, guided ONLY by science and public health concerns, and not by economic impact statistics or your own political aspirations or religious convictions. This is not a time for political or dogmatic posturing. Public school educators and parents will remember if you opt for it when the time comes at the ballot box. Sincerely and with my apologies for going long,

Geraldine Dinkins

I am writing again to urge the school board to vote Plan C. As someone with an autoimmune disease, I am not comfortable sending my child for in person education. While I appreciate the virtual learning path option, there are many unanswered questions regarding it. There is not enough information on the virtual learning path to make an informed decision. Specifically it only shows core classes being offered to the high school students. If my child is not offered all classes and electives, not only would that effect her GPA, and college prospects but could effect her ability to graduate high school. Many elective classes such as foreign language and ROTC being a requirement.

Plan C is the only option that ensures the health, safety and complete education our students deserve.

Again, I urge the school board to open under Plan C and have online instruction available.

Thank you,

Sarah Gallagher

To whom this may concern,

Plan C is the only viable option to ensure the health and safety of students, educators and all staff. It is imperative the school board votes Plan C, full virtual learning for the reopening of Transylvania County Schools. If COVID is so dangerous that even the prison systems across the country are releasing felons early, the constant rise in cases per day, and the uncertainty of everyday life now, I feel as though it would be insane to send our children into an environment that they would be in such close contact. Thank you for your consideration.

Best regards,
Philip Gallagher

Good evening,

I am a mother of three children here in Transylvania county. Two of those children will attend Brevard Middle School this coming year. When I filled out the survey for the schools I was on the side of a plan b. Unfortunately our numbers are rising and there are too many facets that I do not think we have control or understanding of yet. Our county needs to put our children and the staff first and delay in person learning. As you well know this is a worldwide pandemic and these children will not be any further behind then the majority of the world.

We all want things to move forward to what will become our new normal. On that note I believe the first step to getting there is by starting the year on plan c.

Thank you
Margot Drennen

Thank you for your consideration in reviewing what I'm sure is an overwhelming amount of parent opinions in regards to the reopening of schools. I know that you all have been working diligently along with each school's administrators in developing and preparing to implement the best plan for our students. Thankfully, option B allows for a safe return to school while also giving parents the option to choose virtual should they remain fearful. 2 of my 3 children did well with the extended virtual school in the Spring. One will be a senior this year and maintained straight As, electing to continue working even after finding out she could accept her grades as of March 13th. She also took online classes through BRCC. At her age, I expect her to be able to self motivate with little monitoring and be able to retain knowledge. My rising 6th grader maintained honor roll as well, but he learned nothing new after March 13th- his words. My rising freshman was a train wreck. He has a 504. It was very difficult to monitor and track what he was doing even with PowerSchool, google classroom, and excellent communication from his teachers. I believe 2 days of face to face instruction is imperative to the future success of the students in Transylvania county. As a registered nurse, I have my own opinions about COVID19. There is plenty of research coming out that supports the return to school. Please don't take away the parent's option to choose!

Jami Reese

To whom it may concern:

I am coming to you as a concerned parent of 2 children currently enrolled at Rosman High School and Rosman Middle School. I do not want my children exposed to other children and their parents, teachers, administrators, support staff, etc that do not feel the need to wear masks during a global pandemic. However, the virtual option proposed by the TCS School Board does not seem to value the learning opportunities of these students or parents equally. I am unable to understand how a live option for these students is not possible especially in this age of technology. I myself go LIVE on fb for most of our sporting events so people who can not attend in person can also experience the game as it is happening. It seems like such an easy fix to have a teacher turn on a camera and post a link for each child to be able to attend classes from the safety of their homes, especially when so many in our community do not care about the safety of their neighbors. I have taken advantage of the virtual/live school board meetings and feel having that option has given the citizens a better opportunity to be involved in our community and given us a voice. The decision to forgo LIVE instruction for our children is a mistake, one that will have lasting effects for children whose parents are not comfortable sending them off to potentially be infected by this novel virus and then spreading it to immunocompromised parents, potentially killing them. My opinion is that the school board needs to seriously reconsider your virtual option for our children so as to be considered a little more equitable under the law. Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing the changes the school board makes in regards to these points.

Blair Stewart

Hello-

I am writing to express my concern for a return to in-person teaching this August. I am an elementary EC teacher for TCS. One of my biggest concerns for reopening at Plan B is the dismissive and often derogatory attitude of some TCS staff and community members regarding COVID safety procedures. I personally know TCS staff, some in leadership positions, who have publicly stated that they believe COVID to be nothing more than the flu and that our fears are overblown. I have interacted with staff who stated that they “don’t do” masks and others who have been dismissive towards those that do. We should not hear the phrase “oh, do I have to put my mask on?” uttered by any adult in any TCS building, because YES, YOU DO. Getting our students to comply with all the mask, hand-washing, and distancing measures is going to be extremely challenging. It will be even harder if all of our staff aren’t on the same page.

I am asking for Plan C, with strategies in place to help our most vulnerable students. Plan C is not perfect, but it’s our best choice for keeping the community spread to a minimum.

Thank you,

Katie Messmer

Thank you for supporting teachers last week at the board meeting. We appreciate the board being willing to think about their decision in light of all that is going on in our community.

I think this quote sums it up for me.

Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, infectious disease expert Michael Osterholm says "this is not a time to force" schools to reopen.

"You've got to get resources to these local school districts or we're asking them to do the impossible."

The latest CDC guidelines for schools are for a teacher to stay with the same group of students all day. We couldn't begin to do that in the middle or high school. There is a lot we can do when we go back, but it is too risky with the numbers going up to try to do that now.

I have one child that attends West Henderson High School. He is starting virtual. My other son goes to BMS and is scared to go back to school. I teach there also and cannot convince either one of us that we are going to be safe from this disease.

Please vote to start school on Plan C. Our lives should not be risked when we can rise to the occasion and teach virtually to the best of our ability. It may not be perfect, but neither is a school that has to shut down because teachers and students are infected with this disease. Safety should be the #1 priority.

Thank you,
Monica Schultz

--

Monica Schultz, M.Ed
Seventh Grade Teacher, Brevard Middle School
English/Language Arts

If even one life is at risk with a Plan B start, that is too much of a risk. If safety is our number one priority, as it should be, how can we possibly say our schools are equipped and ready for this? All we are asking for is a slower start with Plan C so we can ensure the safety of staff and students. When numbers are not on the increase, teachers will be ready for in person instruction with integrating Plan B. At this point, there is simply too much risk. How will it feel when students and teachers start to contract the virus? Not only will it be a logistical nightmare for quarantine situations, but it will also be an absolute tragedy if we lose a life or a family member's life due to an exposure at school that could have been prevented. Teachers love our students, but I have not yet heard any plans that ensure our safety or theirs. I would not want Our school system to be at fault for a decision that jeopardizes lives.

I know this is a horrible decision to make but when lives are at stake, there is no other decision but Plan C. Please make the right decision for our safety.

--

Monica Schultz, M.Ed
Seventh Grade Teacher, Brevard Middle School
English/Language Arts

Dear Dr. McDaris,

I am sure you have been inundated with emails, but I do not know how many families you have heard from in our certain situation. A situation I feel will become more prevalent as time goes on. I wanted to address two very specific concerns/questions if you will grant the time to read my email. The first question, before I am able to make a decision, is in regards to my rising 3rd grader at BES. Matthew had an IEP put into place right as school closed in March. I'm wondering what this will look like for him if we were to choose the Online Learning Path or if the decision is Option C? Also, what will his IEP look like for Option B? It looks as if students will not be leaving the classroom except for recess (and let's be honest, the weather is not always in our favor & kids don't have recess often enough under normal circumstances!). This poses a concern in addition to the restrictions in place. If I choose the Online Learning Path, my child is not allowed on campus, so how will his IEP be met?

My second, and probably more unique reason for sending this email is that my husband and I have both tested positive for COVID 19. I do not mind sharing this information and am an open book for questions. I still have many myself! We are doing just fine and were able to, and continue to manage our symptoms. With that being said, quarantine looks very different for my two boys (Will and Matthew). I know you have had meetings with the Health Dept., but the quarantine guidelines are different for an "exposure event" than those who are living with a "prolonged exposure" to COVID 19 (according to the Health Dept and Dr. Alderson at Hendersonville Peds). Even the guidelines vary for being "cleared" for those who are positive. My children have been in isolation with us since July 17th with a date of exposure on July 10th. However, their quarantine does not begin until today (July 22) due to the guidelines of symptom improvement for my husband and me. My children will be in isolation/quarantine for at least a total of three weeks. If I was properly diagnosed by my physician, my children would have been quarantined for 4 weeks, 2 weeks longer than my husband and I who are/were positive. This is completely different from the exposure guidelines of 14 days of no symptoms after the date of exposure. I remind you of this information (which was just given to me today) that children living in a home with an infected household member will potentially and most likely be quarantined well beyond 14 days. My husband and I are of the lucky ones with relatively manageable symptoms which lasted approximately 10 days. My point in sharing our experience is that none of this, including our symptoms, have been cut and dry like the data would like it to be. Different employers follow different guidelines. Our information from different health care providers has been inconsistent at best. That is the reality of dealing with COVID 19. I am afraid the situations the school will be faced with, as long as we continue to have a rise in cases, will be messy. It has been for my little family of four.

I appreciate you taking the time to consider my concerns & "hear" from the point of view of a family dealing with COVID 19. My thoughts and prayers are with each and everyone of you as you have an enormous decision to make. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with questions. Stay safe, and stay well!

Kim Hanna

I think it is vital to our kids that they return to school on time. I have one going into 8th and one going into 10th and they need in class learning and be on a schedule plus social interaction and sports need to start back.

I know our schools can be safe to reenter. I also feel that the other options long term can be hazardous to children's mental health and some kids school is all they look forward to. Lastly, my big issue is this whole situation has become political more than about what's best for the kids. Please don't let a few parents or teachers living in fear make the decision because life should go on. Hope you consider at least school 2 to 3 days a week.

Kirby Kimsey

To whom it may concern,

We are writing to you in support of “Plan B” education for Transylvania county school system. As practicing physicians in town, we are aware of COVID-19 illness and it’s ramifications for our community.

The studies performed in the last several months on COVID-19 support the fact that children under 10 years of age do not harbor, or succumb to, nor transmit COVID 19 illness unless genetically predisposed to being immunocompromised.

In general young people in their teens do not seem to be an important vector of transmission in the COVID-19 illness.

We know from CDC recommendations, that face to face education between students and staff could and should be accomplished in a safe manner.

It is also known and supported by recent data, that virtual learning is inadequate in advancing student knowledge and overall education.

Young students require face to face interactions with their peers and teachers to form the building blocks that advance their knowledge. We believe that it is imperative to have physical interactions in real time that promotes and reinforces children’s general idea of learning.

A recent study showed that we may be losing a large group of students by creating unidentified educational gaps setting them aback 6 to 12 months already in a span of last 5 months .

We therefore implore the board to consider that “Plan C” education schedule, which is virtual only education, as wholly unviable option for the children in Transylvania County.

We also understand that safety precautions should be met , and that “Plan B” seems to be the only reasonable option we could support.

Thank you,

Minerva Pineiro, MD
Gerard Szyber , MD

Hello,

Please consider choosing plan C for the start of our school year for ALL students and teachers!

A little over 10 years ago, when I was a senior in college, I went down to Atlanta for a small gathering. Two weeks later I came down with the H1N1 Coronavirus and was the sickest I have ever been in my life. I ended up missing over a month of classes, which my professors most generously allowed me to make up when I returned. I was under the care of three physicians and it took six months for my lungs to mostly recover from the Coronavirus and resulting lung infections. As a result of getting H1N1, I still have chronic congestion, and am more susceptible to respiratory problems which has put me in the at-risk category for Covid-19.

I am an EC teacher at BES. I love my job, and immensely miss my students and teaching. However, I feel that I was an effective online teacher for many of my students and could present quality, differentiated online lessons in both academics and social emotional learning if the county chooses Plan C. I have heard rumblings that there is a possibility of a motion to allow our EC and all students from the new SELF (Social Emotional Learning Framework) classes to come for in-person learning regardless if the county chooses Plan C. If this is more than a rumor, there are many reasons I feel that this is an unsafe situation for my students, my coworkers, and myself. In many cases, whether it is for instruction purposes, or for the safety of the student or others, maintaining appropriate social distancing would be near impossible in an EC classroom. I foresee EC students with sensory processing and behavioral issues having difficulty keeping their masks on. Hygiene and sanitation will most likely be such an ongoing issue that effective instruction will be difficult.

I implore you to keep us safe by voting Plan C for all students. We know that this virus can lead to permanent, debilitating health problems or worse. However, it isn't going to last forever. Please consider starting our school year with Plan C. Please keep us safe. Thank you for your time and consideration.

--

K. Emily Webb
Special Education
Brevard Elementary School

Members of the Board,

As you prepare for your impossible decision Monday night, I offer these final thoughts.

LIFE and SAFETY triumphs EVERYTHING ELSE! Yes, all the issues of the mental health of kids, safety in their home environments, IEP's, connectivity, value of learning, etc. are important. But they aren't as important as life.

Since Covid started, there have been continuous debates over every element of it. It seems that every time they learn something about Covid it changes a week or two later. Pediatricians still can't agree. It seems that every week or two the age at which people are at risk decreases. Just this week I saw a study that is showing that now high school and college age kids are more at risk than initially thought. They used to be safe. How long will it be before we discover that kids really are at risk? How sad it would be in a few months to sit here saying, "Oops, we were wrong about kids."

And there are still very big questions about the long term effects of Covid. The point is that Covid is STILL UNKNOWN.

Do we really want to risk this? Do we really want to try to implement systems that in theory will keep kids separated but in reality quickly show us that kids between the ages of 5-15 struggle with keeping separated. Do we really want to cram kids into corners of the rooms because they have to sit 6 feet apart? Do we really want to send mass groups of people into confined spaces while the number of cases is rising quickly every day? Do we really think it's safe to have hundreds of people in one building when we can't have them in movie theaters, playgrounds, restaurants, bars, etc? Do we really think in-person instruction will be that much better than online learning when we spend the entire day worrying about all the safety procedures we have to follow and if every time we move or touch something we may be contaminating it. How focused will people really be when we are that worried about our safety?

We cannot hide from the virus forever. But we should be smart and wait until there is a proven vaccine, and until we know the true effects.

Let's follow the lead of so many other counties and begin the year on Plan C. NO CHILD is expendable. NO teacher is expendable. If we go back too soon and even one person dies because of it that is a tragedy, and a tragedy that will have long-term effects greater than those we have being stuck at home.

We have many brilliant minds in this county. Once the decision is made to begin (on Plan C) THEN we can become the most innovative county by finding ways to make online learning effective, getting everyone access to connect, getting kids supervision so parents can go to work, etc. I've already begun contacting churches and community centers. There are already a few that have offered to open their doors for kids to have access to Internet and/or work while parents go to work. Some parents have already formed groups where they rotate hosting kids they know at their house while the other parents go to work. Maybe we have a couple volunteer teachers in the school to take a small number of highest risk kids in the cafeteria on an emergency basis for their work and safety. There are solutions. Let's be smart and safe and start with Plan C, and then use our brilliant minds to find solutions to issues that remain. Our lives matter enough for that.

We all know this is an impossible decision. But life and safety are not impossible.

In the name of safety and life above all else, I ask for plan C to begin this year.

Dan Courtine
5th Grade Teacher
Brevard Elementary
399 Greenville Hwy
Brevard, NC 28712

Hi Mr McDaris,

I just wanted to share my thoughts with you on reopening our schools. I truly do feel Plan B can be done safely as I have seen & been a part of planning for it at BHS. I think with all the safety measures in place everyone should be able to remain unaffected as long as everyone does their part. Ive spoken to many members of our community that want their kids back in school & feel safe sending them & as a grandparent i feel the same way sending my own family in. There just isn't a better alternative for in person leaning in my opinion.

As a local custodian I know my role & duties will be higher & I know our team at BHS is fine with that. I do wish more of our staff was as receptive to the added duties, especially since many earn twice or more than our salary haha. And we have already been inside of our local schools all of these months preparing them & havent seen any of the extra covid bonuses some got.

I do realize our case numbers have been on an uptick & while that seems scary, it still remains less than 1% of our fulltime population. And from what ive researched school aged children don't really seem to be affected by the virus like the elderly or compromised folks are. The CDC just released some info on schools reopening & it really shows that it can be done safely.

I know many in our community & some who are also staff members are rallying for plan C & i feel if we do go that route it should be temporary & only a few weeks till reevaluated. There are many kids who just dont do well online & another portion who have terrible home lives & school is their sanctuary.

I know this is a very hard decision & I do not envy yall in having to make it haha. But I just wanted to share my thoughts & opinions on it. I do wish yall luck & guidance in deciding what is the best way to proceed.

Thanks, Jon Wilson

Good morning:

I emailed you last week with my parental input on the operations of Transylvania County Schools re-entry plan for the upcoming fall year. I appreciate the thoughtful response of Dr. McDaris on my concerns! I realize the board will be making your final decision tomorrow on the schedule for upcoming year and wanted to once more reach out to express my hopes for my children and their educational opportunities in Transylvania County.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/reopening-schools.html>

Three days ago the CDC released the above article encouraging schools to reopen with in-class attendance. I realize the governor has limited NC school options and Plan B is certainly a better option than no interaction at all. The CDC outlines the harmful affects on children of extended school closures that exceed far past the academic or minimal covid impact. It has already been proven, and reiterated in the CDC article, that "covid poses relatively low risks to school-aged children".

I respect the parents that are making the decision to keep their children at home for virtual learning. However, I beg you to give parents the option to put their kids in a Plan B scenario for those that feel that is the best option for their child to be in an in-person school environment! One plan does not fit all, so to box all parents and children into a virtual only setting is senseless and not based on the evidence.

If we have been allowing the CDC to impact the decisions the country has made thus far with shut downs and mask mandates; why wouldn't we follow their suggestions with school re-openings as well?! In addition, camps and daycares in the area have been open all summer and there has been no breakouts in those settings. It doesn't make sense to be fully virtual based on the experiences in our area and the scientific data. I strongly encourage you to re-open Transylvania County Schools under Plan B with partial in-school attendance.

Thank you for your time!

Trish Cheek
parent of two Rosman students

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen;

Hope you and your family are doing well. Appreciate all you are trying to do for our schools under these crazy times.

Not sure where all of you stand on opening schools in some fashion for the fall.

Want to pass along that I have received a lot of comments from very concerned parents. These are parents from our lower socioeconomic county citizens and most have younger kids in school. In most cases both parents (if there are two) in the family currently have to work to make ends meet. They have no clue what they will do if the kids are not back in school during the day as you know child care is very hard to come about in our country and also very expensive. I know from our grandsons experience that he learned very little during the past couple of months of the school year and this was even with caring parents. I can imagine how a kid will fair with no one at home to oversee what they do and in many cases do not have access to internet. Also as we know from the Sheriff, domestic violence in homes is up, drug use and alcohol abuse also on the rise. Our schools are also a screening opportunity to help identify potential child abuse in the homes. This is critical. We have also spent hundred of thousands of dollars feeding our kids as we have stated that without government feeding them they will not get the nourishment they need and the schools have assumed this roll. This is either important or not.

Last but not least the science and numbers have proved that the risk to kids from Covid is very slim.

Based on all this I encourage you to at least do plan B and allow the kids to attend a few days per week. We owe his to our kids and parents that are struggling as it is to deal with all that is going on and they do not need anther crisis to deal with involving their kids.

Thanks again for your consideration.

Larry L. Chapman

Jenny,

As a grandparent of two children in Brevard Elementary School who was in charge of the virtual teaching last year since both parents work full time, I also work full time but thankfully from home, I cannot stress enough that the virtual packets do not work. If these children have to learn virtually it needs to be at a certain time in front of a live teacher. Giving lessons at the beginning of the week to be completed by the end of the week is fine for those kids that need no extra help but my grandson is starting middle school this year and I could barely keep up with what he was learning last year, how will I teach him this year? The lessons the teachers give are helpful but it takes hours, is exhausting and frustrating for the kids. It has taken three years for this school district to finally approve my granddaughter for the tutoring she so badly needs and was on schedule to start this year. What will happen to her now? I have ordered online programs to help her but feel like I need to go back to school to be able to teach them properly. She is entering the third grade and still can't read!

When I turned in all of her work at the end of last year I also picked up her report card at the same time!!! How on earth will these children keep up when they are just going to push them forward whether they do the work or not?

So that is my suggestion if they are not going to open the schools up, which I understand, then let's find a way to have live classrooms daily. Other states are doing it and did it last year. I am not sure why we can't seem to find a way to do it too. Comporium offered free DSL to those who couldn't afford it so let's not use that an excuse either.

Thank you for your time,

Cynthia Howard

The potential negative consequences of an in person school opening right now is too great. The negative ripple effects of an in person opening will be far greater than that of a remote start.

Michael Drake

Dear Members of the School Board,

I am writing to express my thoughts about the school decision, and *what we want* versus what is actually *going to be possible*.

I am in the minority here with a unique situation. I have my oldest child in the self contained special needs class at the high school with Donna Samotis, and my younger three children have all been at Brevard Academy for years. My oldest is 16 and this will be her second year at the high school, and she has autism, cerebral palsy, seizures, and she is non verbal and very anxious. My other three are typically developing and are a rising 8th grader, 5th grader, and kindergartener at Brevard Academy. I myself am a former elementary education teacher, and resigned to stay home with the kids.

This certainly has been an interesting few months and you all have a difficult decision ahead of you. Since we have this opportunity for our parent voices to be heard, I thought I would just tell you a special education parent's perspective. I did appreciate the comments made at last week's meeting about the concern for special education. We are all different and not every parent of a child with an IEP will not have the same situation or opinion.

I do not even know what would be best for special needs. I have thought long and hard about this. I have children in different categories. I am perfectly fine and confident about sending my other three back to Brevard Academy two days in person. I have really appreciated the thoughtful concern, planning, and frequent updates every week all summer long from the director at Brevard Academy. They are small and they have been working all summer to figure out how to make each plan work, no matter which plan it would be. I have relief that if the in-person route at Brevard Academy does not work for my situation, I have freedom to change it. I feel a strong sense of organization, caring, confidence, and peace coming from Brevard Academy. Those three children attended summer daycamp at Mountain Roots and we had the opportunity to see how it would work for my children to wear a mask and socially distance with their peers. It went amazingly well. My five year old has adapted like he does not even know the difference. He kept a mask on. He was excited to play "Noodle Tag" - a socially distanced form of tag - because it was fun to tag people with the end of a pool noodle. Kindergarteners will adapt. It is the parents who are struggling, but the kids can adapt.

When it comes to sending my daughter with special needs to the high school, I have all unknowns. Her teacher has been doing summer school online with her and her class all summer long. The special ed teacher does not know what in-person school will or could look like. We are not in the same category as regular ed. When my daughter has online school, I sit next to her the entire hour because she cannot do anything by herself and needs constant supervision. When the teacher asks her a question, I have to hold up the choices that the teacher has printed out, cut out, and mailed to us. Often my daughter will get up and just try to walk out of the room. Online school is not ideal at all and quite challenging for us. It is a temporary, not that great solution.

When I think about sending Lilli to the classroom two days a week, I know that she will not keep a mask on, nor should she ever wear one at all because of her seizure disorder, sensory issues, and anxiety. She sits on the floor often and every waking hour I witness her putting things that have been on the floor into her mouth. She takes off her shoes and plays with her toes. She needs help with every part of going to the restroom.

I really want Lilli to go back to school, to be able to ride the bus, to see her peers and interact with others. I want her to have speech therapy and learn. I want her to be mentally stimulated. I just cannot figure out how this can happen. I don't want to admit that it really is not possible at this time. I think we all want to return to normal, and my daughter just really wants to get on that big yellow bus with Mr. Paul and ride it to school to see her friends. What will the bus ride look like? She always sat in the same seat as the aid, so the aid could keep her in her seat and watch her for seizure activity. Would she be allowed to sit next to the aid? Doesn't seem like it would be allowed. She cannot wear a mask. Someone needs to hold her hand or arm to help her up or down steps. She cannot be directly exposed to sprayed chemicals and cleaning products because of her sensitivities. How can a teacher socially distance when they have to take her to a bathroom and change her pull-up? How can a teacher socially distance from my non-mask-wearing daughter when they literally have to turn on the faucets and wash her hands for her? She also needs help with feeding and dressing.

As much as I want the opportunity for my daughter with special needs to come back to school in person, I do not know how it would be possible. And online school is very challenging. There is no good solution. There is no good answer.

I do not envy you and your task of making this decision. I think that the answer does not lie in what we want, or what anyone wants. I think the answer lies in what is actually going to be possible. Can my other three children go to Brevard Academy, wear masks, sit 6 feet apart, use their own school supplies, eat snack and lunch at their desks, use hand sanitizer all day long, and run around outside at a social distance for PE class and exercise? Yes, I think it will absolutely be possible. It's not wonderful, but it is possible.

Can my oldest child who has special needs go back to school in the special needs classroom and stay 6 feet apart from everyone the entire time and wear a mask? No. She cannot. That will not be possible. What is possible will be more of the decision-maker than what we want for our kids.

Thank you for hearing our perspective.

Sincerely,

Jennie VanDyke

Dear Dr. McDaris and Board Members,

As a teacher and parent, I have several comments about re-opening our schools. As a teacher,(speech-language pathologist) my colleagues and I made virtual learning work the best we could in the spring. I was able to see the majority of my caseload but there were challenges and it was very difficult to fully deliver services. It was just not effective. During some sessions, the students would either not sit still or were shy and hard to engage. If the student didn't have the internet and were using their parents' phone, sound quality was not good and service was spotty. It was hard to tell if the child was making good sound productions. Many of our students on all of our caseloads have goals to improve social skills. As you can imagine this is also very difficult to work on via computer. Some students never logged in or parents/guardians could not be reached. They missed speech time and in some cases academic support. Children need to be in school. They are missing so much by not being in school across all developmental areas, academically and socially, not to mention the children that rely on us (the school, teachers and staff) as their "safe place" for food, a warm smile and an encouraging word.

Full time virtual learning does not work for our family. My girls both struggle in math and hired a tutor over the summer to fill in some of the gaps. Direct instruction is so important and most effective for my girls. They need some type of normalcy and routine again. They need their friends. So as a teacher and a parent of an 8th and 10th grader, I am all for face-to-face in school learning even if it is on an A/B schedule. I know it will look a lot different, but I know our district has outlined guidelines for this and I trust that they will be followed to ensure the safety of students and teachers. Thank you for giving parents and teachers the opportunity to voice our concerns and considering each comment to make this very difficult decision.

Sincerely,
Kristie Blankenship

Dear Board Members,

Please vote for Plan C for at least the first 6 weeks. I outlined many science-based facts in my previous letter so I won't belabor many of those same points. However, several new facts have come to light over the last week, and I think we would be remiss in not noting and taking action regarding them.

First, the NC DHHS is reporting Transylvania county has a 6% transmission rate, well above the recommendations by the CDC. How can we justify returning to school when we left school with a 0% infection rate?

The CDC claims that we probably have 100 times more infected than we know. This statistic puts the cases in our county at more than 1,000.

At least 150 prominent scientists and physicians have signed a letter asking that we shut down the entire country again. The CDC revised its recommendations only after the President roundly and publicly criticized it as too demanding and expensive. It is unreasonable for this many healthcare workers to call for a shutdown and we ask teachers and students to return to the classroom.

More than half NC students will return to school under the guidelines for Plan C, and these numbers do not factor in students and families choosing home school (in my understanding--please forgive me if I'm wrong). We now know kids from the ages of 10-18 spread the virus the same way adults do and at the same rates.

Several folks have mentioned there's little consensus regarding returning to in-person school. This is absolutely true, but there are many issues where we don't have consensus and have to make tough decisions. There was no consensus on how to address race relations (and there's still not), but our school system took difficult steps in the 1960s to integrate our schools. We made a difficult situation more fair and more humane even though it was a struggle for people on all sides.

This analogy is more appropriate than it appears on the surface. We KNOW our minority families are suffering more and dying at disproportionate rates than white folks. Returning to school will spread the virus--this is not a theory--we know that it's true--and our most vulnerable populations will be hurt, physically and emotionally than others.

Transylvania Co. Regional has 92 beds and 6 ICU beds, with a maximum of 6 ventilators. Some places in Florida, Texas, and other states are showing hospitals overwhelmed with patients and at capacity. Sure, they have more potential patients as they are more populous, but they have more hospital beds, as well.

Everyone in my immediate family has an underlying condition. Everyone. There are some hospitals working with ethicists to determine who can be saved and who probably won't live so they can send the sickest patients home to die.

I feel confident we will have people resign over returning to physical school. Look at the state of teacher colleges in the state, and it's easy to see we will indubitably struggle to replace them.

I could go on. If you know me at all, you know it's true. I mean just consider other, difficult questions. Our custodians work hard already. They cannot deep clean every classroom every

night, especially while they already drive buses and do numerous other tasks. What about people in the bathrooms? Horseplay? PDA? Visitors? Ventilation issues? Substitute teachers who, at least at BHS, are all high-risk? I'm very sure many people have tried to tackle these questions and more. However, this is uncharted territory, and we will meet many unforeseen issues as we proceed.

Put simply, this is a moral issue above all else. I have lived my life believing I have a responsibility to help others, and I have proven my willingness to do so consistently. It is within our power to be creative problem-solvers and provide our students with the best education possible while making compromises to keep people reasonably safe.

As always, I appreciate your time and energy as you consider our way forward. Please vote for Plan C as we return to school.

Regards,

Josh Tinsley

I know the vote tonight is not one you will make easily. There are so many considerations to keep in mind.

The one that is the most important to me, however, is safety.

We know that 1 in 4 educators are high risk (<https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/how-many-teachers-are-at-risk-of-serious-illness-if-infected-with-coronavirus/>).

We know that the CDC estimates that infection rates are 10 TIMES HIGHER than reported (<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/t0625-COVID-19-update.html>).

We know that the CDC estimates that 40% of infected individuals are asymptomatic--meaning they are transmitting the disease without even realizing they have it (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/planning-scenarios.html>).

We know that just 9 days ago, the NY Times reported on the best large scale study of COVID and children. They conclude: "The study is more worrisome for children in middle and high school. This group was even more likely to infect others than adults were." They also quote Dr. Michael Osterholm, an infectious disease expert at the University of Minnesota as saying, "We can speculate all day about this, but we just don't know. The bottom line message is: There's going to be transmission." (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/18/health/coronavirus-children-schools.html>)

We know that the CDC previously indicated that a 5% infection rate is the threshold for determining if it is safe for schools to meet in person. We know that Transylvania County's infection rate is now at 6%, according to the testing dashboard on the NCDHHS website.

We know COVID disproportionately impacts Black and brown communities in NC. African-Americans are 21% of NC's population, but they have 24% of cases and comprise 32% of deaths. Hispanics are only 9% of the population of NC but have 42% of cases in the state (<https://covidtracking.com/race/dashboard>).

We know our community can and will rally to help those who have been negatively impacted by school closures. We saw that in March. Our educator community and the larger community of Transylvania County will work to protect our students from the negative impacts of schools not meeting in person. We will institute community care. But we cannot take back the harm imposed on our community by returning to instruction in person.

We know we do not have the funding, staffing, or the resources we need to adequately meet all of the requirements from DHHS. We have the will, but not the means. Until we have the means, we must do what is right to protect the greatest number of people in our community.

I urge you to vote for a return to learning that is virtual. For EVERYONE.

Thank you.

With humility and sincerity,

Meredith Licht
President, Transylvania County NCAE

Dear Dr. McDaris,

I thoroughly appreciate your time and effort to read my email. I could not let this day go by without communicating to you my deep concern for the health of our veteran teachers, staff and support staff at this time. Please consider these points prior to today's vote on how we should re-enter this school year.

The idea that children are "bumpers" and do not transmit Covid-19 has been debunked.

My wife and I are completely dedicated to the education of the young people of Transylvania County but are both at high risk if we contract the disease. I have high blood pressure and my wife Keron (EC Teacher's Assistant at BHS) also has high blood pressure and a chronic lung condition caused by histoplasmosis leaves us vulnerable. According to a new study from South Korea in the journal Emerging Infectious Diseases July 21, 2020 -- "Children and teens between ages 10-19 are more likely to spread the coronavirus among family members than adults and children under 10." Since reading that I have learned from multiple sources that teenagers do in fact transmit the disease.

Also, the American Academy of Pediatrics is often misquoted. They say "Returning to school is necessary for healthy development, **but science does not support the move at this time.**" The latter half of this quote is most often ignored and therefore the American Academy of Pediatrics is subsequently misquoted. The group said this month in a statement. **"Public health agencies must make recommendations based on evidence, not politics. We should leave it to health experts to tell us when the time is best to open up school buildings."**

Our community deserves a SAFE return to school. We are not there yet.

Please follow the wise decisions of our neighbors in Asheville and Henderson County and vote to return to school virtually, using plan C.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jim Leatherwood
Director of Bands
Brevard High School

After studying the lists of cancellations in all areas of public life all over the state and the country, I can only reach one conclusion --

In spite of the limits of online teaching, all schools in Transylvania County should be online only, at least until the end of the year. Anything else is simply too dangerous to students, to teachers and staff, and ultimately to everyone in the county.

If every parent who quits a full-time job to do at-home child care were given a minimum supplement of \$3000 a month, it would still be cheaper than the cost of a full-scale statewide epidemic. The state and the federal government should rise to this crisis now, before it's too late.

Preston Woodruff

To Dr. McDaris and the school board:

I want to say thank you for not rushing into a decision last Monday night, and I am certain this has been a difficult week for each of you with the decision that has to be made this evening.

To say that I am greatly concerned about returning to work in the school building would be an understatement especially with the spike in cases that we have seen in the last couple of weeks. I take this virus very seriously and have heeded all the precautions the CDC has given to the public. I do this for the safety of my own family, my parents, and my 90 year old grandmother as well as for those in my community that I don't know personally but still value. My husband and I have always taught our girls to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. That being said, I do see both sides of the story when it comes to Plan B and Plan C. While I personally feel that Plan C is a better and definitely safer choice, I know there are parents who need their children back in school so they can go to work. There are also neglected and/or abused students of all ages who need a safe place to be for part of the day.

I would like for you all to consider a mix of the two plans. With the nature of this virus, we know we will have staff out for several days (maybe even weeks) at a time and we do not have subs to cover all of the positions. My idea would be to have all middle and high school students on remote learning but offer a supervised learning place set up like a learning lab setting (possibly in the gymnasiums and a few classrooms) at each of the middle and high schools that students who do not have internet access, do not feel safe being at home, or any that need some extra help could come to the school building to have those educational needs met. There could be a teacher for English, Math, Social Studies and Science there to cover all areas of education. This would free up staff to help when elementary teachers are out so we could continue to serve elementary age children in person at least 3-4 days a week. It would also allow middle and high school teachers to plan a quality remote learning education for students - something that TCS could be proud of and at the same time protecting the health of our students and staff.

I am sure you have heard many ideas from so many different people but I appreciate you taking the time to consider mine. I think we all want to help the kids of Transylvania County but it needs to be carried out in the safest way for all involved.

Thank you and I look forward to your hearing your decision this evening.

Amber Scott

Good Afternoon Dr. McDaris,

I watched all of the Board Meeting last week and sent in my letters asking the members to vote plan C. I know how tirelessly you have worked on all of this. I appreciate everything you do!

Thursday I learned from the Transylvania Times that Brevard Academy will open under plan B. With many new changes-a full-time nurse with a separate nurse's building, a special ventilation system, specialized cleaning equipment, a second school counselor, etc. My first concern is that TCS will try to offer the same plan B but without the same safety measures.

My second concern is that if Transylvania County goes with plan B that it will only be a matter of time before we will have to roll into plan C. Leaving us all to be thrown right back where we were on March 12th of last school year with little to no time to plan once again for online instruction.

I am close to the parents of the children I teach. I have heard from many of them that they will be choosing to homeschool. They are afraid to send children back and also unsure of what virtual school will look like. This makes me SO sad! I really feel like we could do an awesome job with virtual school if given the opportunity to prepare.

I have been researching and watching videos this Summer. There are some great resources that cost very little that my team and I have discussed would allow us to have virtual guided groups with our younger children. I do believe this is what the parents of younger children want. I called every one of my parents every Friday during the time we were virtual and the number one thing I heard was "Mrs. Worley, I just don't know how to teach it like you teach it." Teaching these groups virtually will not only keep us all safer but will allow us to make a connection with the children and families. I know this is not for every grade or every teacher but I do believe we can deliver solid reading and math instruction to our youngest learners through virtual lessons.

The second thing I heard the most was "we just don't have a schedule or know how to create structure." I believe by offering virtual groups at the same time and on the same days (depending on what groups you will be working with) that we can provide a schedule and structure for our young children. Very much like what they experience every day in the classroom.

I only had one family out of 17 that had a hard time getting internet. This mom had four children. First grade through twelfth. I was able to tell her about the free internet at the community center to use until I could see what else could be done. A week later and a few calls and their home internet problem was resolved. While I know there will be some cases where it may be impossible, we have so many community partners who are willing to help families get what they need. I believe we have the ability to bring quality virtual education to all of our children. Will it take some time to get everybody up and going and the kinks worked out-absolutely but I know we can do it.

Thank you for taking the time to hear my thoughts and concerns. Again, I appreciate everything you do for our schools and communities.

Jennifer Worley
RES First Grade

Dear Dr. McDaris,

Thank you so very, very much for postponing your vote on TCS's return to school plan.

I am a parent of a child and will make the hard choice to stay home to keep my child at home to homeschool her or go with the TCS Virtual Option. I know this is a position of privilege but as cases surge in our community and across the country I do not feel it is safe to be sending teachers and students back to the school building. I will be leaving my position as a preschool teacher to stay home and teach my child at home.

I know you know this isn't fair. It isn't fair that our state and federal leaders have lacked the courage and vision to ensure that our most vulnerable populations are protected. It isn't fair that schools have become the solution to society's problems of food insecurity, lack of access to mental health care and support, broken families, inadequate wages and job opportunities, just to name a few. It isn't fair that we aren't funded to be able to really provide for these problems--but, of course, you all do your best anyway. And, of course, you know our system doesn't have the adequate funding and resources to ensure that EVERY. SINGLE. REQUIREMENT set forth by DHHS is met in all of our schools.

This pandemic is not a problem our schools can fix. I am afraid, and evidence suggests, that opening up schools at all will exacerbate it.

I know delaying the start of in-person instruction will not stop COVID from spreading. But it CAN help slow that spread.

I also know that whatever decision you make will make people unhappy. But more important than making people happy is keeping people safe. I know TCS will continue to feed and nourish students physically and emotionally as best you can. I saw that my child's educators worked harder than ever from March through June. But my student's educators cannot care for my child if either of them is hospitalized or dead. And that *is* going to happen.

I urge you to vote to open schools on Plan C for at least six weeks.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Allison Nergart - Parent of a TCS Kindergartener

I come to you not only as a school nurse for Transylvania County Schools but first and foremost as a parent to a 2nd grader and a 6th grader in Transylvania County Schools. I want you all to know that my husband and I are in complete support of re-entering schools under Plan B. I would not say that as a medical professional if I did not feel like it was a safe option for my children and I. I do not take my job as a parent or a school nurse lightly. I am dedicated to doing the right thing and working my hardest in both roles.

I am resigned to the fact that this school year is not going to look like any of my previous 15 years as a school nurse but I pledge to work tirelessly to ensure the safety and well being of both students and staff in each of the schools I serve and I know the other two school nurses will do the the same. One simple fact about school nursing is that in order to be an effective school nurse there needs to be students to care for within the school buildings. Under Plan B my job will be extremely difficult but a challenge that I am ready and willing to accept. Things like vision screenings and flu vaccine campaigns will take double the amount of time than it has in years past. It can still be done! More than ever children need some sense of normalcy in these unprecedented times that we are walking.

In conclusion, I am speaking to you first as a parent and saying that my children need to return to school for face to face instruction, even if it is for 2 days a week. If my children who come from a loving, two parent home, with 3 meals a day, and a good night kiss as they are tucked into a bed each night need to return to school imagine how important and beneficial it would be for the many children in our county who are not experiencing the same upbringing. As a school nurse I feel like it is imperative to get these students back in the school buildings in order to meet their physical, mental, social, and educational needs.

I am available if any of you have questions or concerns that I can help answer.

Sincerely,
April Owenby

--

*April H. Owenby, RN, NCSN
School Health Nurse
PFES, BES, BHS, & DRS*