

Public Comments
March 16, 2021

#1

Dear School Board Members,

My name is Meredith Licht. For those of you who don't know me, I am a 19-year veteran teacher at BHS, where in addition to teaching social studies, English, and journalism, I have been the graduation project coordinator, Devil Den coordinator, a department head of two departments, and a mentor teacher. I also serve as the president of the Transylvania County Association of Educators. But I am more than just an educator. I am an educator-wife and parent. My husband is also a TCS teacher of 14 years. Our two children have both come through Transylvania County Schools, and our youngest is currently in her senior year. I come to you as a concerned citizen, parent, and educator.

I do not envy your position. You have to make a very difficult decision about whether or not to send our middle and high school students and educators back full time, and no matter what decision you make, some party will be unhappy. That's a tough situation. I thank you for being willing to make tough decisions.

Instead of sharing with you my reasons for encouraging you to wait until the fall of 2021 to return to full-time instruction on Plan A, I thought it would mean more for you to hear comments from parents, educators, and parent-educators from Brevard Middle and High School and Rosman High. TCAE has collected feedback from people all over the county, but I thought it makes the most sense to share the feedback of those who will be most affected by your decision.

These folks say:

Teachers, students, parents, support staff, the BOE, administrators, and many, many more folks have worked to maintain the CDC's guidelines during COVID. I do not think it is time to revamp the processes that we've already determined to be safe. We will not be able to maintain even 3 feet of social distancing if my A and B students join in-person class at the same time.

In addition to the concerns about physical safety, I have worked diligently to create safe, honest, caring learning communities in all of my classes. It takes days (weeks this year) to do this. The kids must trust the teacher, but the teacher must facilitate the kids beginning to trust one another so that there can be honest dialogue amongst all parties. These times require a great deal of honesty and authenticity so we can support students' emotional health. By joining all the sections together, I will have to try and build these communities' trust in a very short period of time. I don't foresee that happening. Additionally, we have very limited time with our students just in terms of where we are in the school year. I frequently formally and informally survey my students. Many of them say they cannot handle the stress of a 5-day school week at school right now. Finally, everyone has been subjected to all sorts of upheaval over the past year. Emotionally, I don't think we need any more changes. Speaking as a teacher, we are exhausted. We know other people are too, but I have never experienced this level of exhaustion in my 14 years of teaching.

I am very concerned about making a change when so much has changed already. I have spoken to students who say they are not emotionally ready to return to school full-time. Educators have worked so hard to make in-person learning work within the confines of social

distancing, and to move away from those safety measures into plan A would be disheartening and dangerous.

Our current plan seems to be working. We still have COVID cases, but they are managed moderately well due to the protocols we have in place. Without those protocols (masks, 6ft distancing, days for deep cleaning, etc.), I no longer believe that students and teachers will be in even a remotely safe environment. Our facilities simply cannot accommodate 6 ft social distancing with increased class sizes and our already understaffed custodial team will have to work overtime to keep our school sanitized.

I do not feel that returning to regular, full-time, full-size classes is in the best interest of either my students, myself, other teachers, non-licensed personnel, or the administration at the present time. I do feel that it would be best for TCS to plan for the return to full-time, full-size classes in the Fall of 2021 with proper cautions taken to ensure that all of the CDC's strictures are being fully-implemented and that precautions have also been taken to account for the many issues that BHS will face as the construction begins on the school under the Bond Program. Returning to Plan A with roughly five weeks of classes left in the school year at a time when not every teacher has been fully vaccinated and a significant number of students and/or their families are still testing positive for the virus, does not seem like a common-sense choice. Rather, let's start out the new school year right when virtually everyone has been vaccinated and the infection rate has been reduced tremendously -- that would seem to make common-sense.

Hard to know what is happening in the schools since parents are so disconnected. If the CDC continues to recommend 6-foot distance, and kids under 16 vaccines are not yet available, and with variant viruses, how do we think less than 6 foot spacing is okay? I want kids back in school, but we are not ready, and not providing social distancing is unacceptable.

If we go back to a full schedule, I feel that social distancing will be an issue. I also feel that attendance will be a huge problem because a good majority of high school students now have jobs and education is not the priority.

Students have been so disrupted already, it seems truly counterproductive to make them adjust to yet another change for what appears as if it will be only 5 weeks.

I feel that things are just now starting to feel normal and successful under plan B.

Plan B has been a challenge, but we have the procedures down. I feel safe staying with Plan B until next fall, when everyone will have had an opportunity to get vaccinated. Then, and only then, is Plan A safe.

I am very concerned that our board will vote to go to plan A without understanding the implications. No one can understand if they are not walking in our shoes. Come spend a week in my classroom with all I do now and listen to my serious concerns and then make a decision.

I am concerned that when we return to plan A, 30% of families will choose not to have their children return to a high school not practicing social distancing. They will want to convert to remote. Who will teach those children? Teachers are now working 50-70 hours per week. They are unable to teach a group in person at the same time they are teaching another group at home with no more than a day or two of lead time. Even with lead time it is an expectation that truly [is] not possible to do successfully without technology that we do not have.

I am concerned because condensing classes will make very large classes and we will have 26-30 students in a single small room eating lunch unmasked for 30 minutes while high school students are said to have the same risk as adults.

I am concerned that if a student is quarantined they will be missing 10 days of instruction, while in plan B they only miss 4 days and get video lessons at home. Teachers are not equipped to offer quarantined students the level of instruction they will need at the same time they are teaching full classes of in-person students.

I do NOT want to hear that teachers and schools will do what it takes because it is in the best interest of the children. We are doing that now. We have all sacrificed our personal lives, our family time, and our physical health (because working 60-70 hours a week during a pandemic clearly affects our physical and/or mental health.) We can do no more and do it successfully. Everyone, most importantly the students, will lose if we are forced to go to Plan A without a plan to teach those that choose to stay home without adding more to teachers' very full plate.

Moving to Plan A before the end of the semester will cause way more harm than good for EVERYONE who spends some or all of their weekdays in our middle and high schools. We are already operating at dangerous levels of stress, anxiety, and depression... upending the little bit of consistency we've achieved in over a year is the kind of idiotic decision made by [people] who work in politics of education but don't know anything about the practice of education.

At this point in the year, I feel that it would cause more disruption to bring everyone back and we would not be socially distanced no matter what classroom you are in.

It is ridiculous to enact further change in an already disruptive school year, especially since we have to administer standardized tests. Small class sizes are THE answer to all of public education's issues...not technology, not any special programs...Also, at BMS, our cafeteria staff does not deliver breakfast to students, nor do they collect baskets. Certified EC teachers do that! That blows my mind!

6 ft is one reason we have been so fortunate in stopping the spread. As an educator I feel it is safe for students and staff. When contacted about close contacts my students have been fine within my room. Parents (I have a middle schooler) feel safe with the 6 ft distance. We have been a leader in going back to school. I was all for it but I think jeopardizing the 6 ft is a serious issue. I want everyone to be safe. Research shows that middle and high schoolers are bigger spreaders than young children. We have been so successful let's not jeopardize

this for a few weeks of instruction. Let's return next year with an excellent plan like we did last year. I say finish strong. I know that even 3 ft will not fit my combined classes. I barely get 6 ft in on my fullest classes. That aside I feel that goes against everything ever followed for pandemics and distancing to stop the spread. It has always been 6 ft. We are still unsure about the effectiveness of the vaccine. It could be 60% effective on a good note. As a parent, I want my middle and high schooler to continue to learn in a safe environment of 6 ft apart. Even giving students the choice of 4 days will jeopardize those numbers. Let's finish the year strongly and consistently for students. They need consistency, especially now. Let's plan on knowing more in August and having a great return plan like we did this year.

These folks have very serious and legitimate concerns. I hope you will consider their voices and their stories as you move forward in your discussions, deliberations, and decision-making about our middle and high schools.

I urge you to keep our schools, our students, and our educators on Plan B. We already are making provisions for our students with IEPs to attend 4 days if they choose. Some are even coming 5 days!

What we are doing right now is working the best it can. Our students and our staff are doing the best they can to navigate through a very difficult situation right now. We are surviving a pandemic! That is quite an accomplishment in itself. And we are one of the very few districts who have had in-person instruction the whole school year. We have a lot to be proud of, but I think it is inadvisable -- considering the concerns outlined above -- to introduce another change with such little time for adjustment. It takes several weeks to adjust to a new schedule, and once we've done that, we'll have a week of instruction and then exams. It just doesn't seem worth the additional work, planning, revisions to plans, and troubleshooting that will be required.

Please, hear our pleas. Honor the hard work, the heartache, and the headaches we've all endured -- our teachers, assistants, bus drivers, custodians, child nutrition workers, office personnel -- to make this school year work. Let us finish the year as we started it and put our efforts into a good plan for a safe, full return next school year.

Sincerely,

Meredith Licht
President, Transylvania County NCAE

Jessica Compton
Brevard Middle School
400 Fisher Road
Brevard, NC 28712

March 15 2021

Transylvania County School Board
Mrs. Tawny McCoy
Mr. Ron Kiviniemi
Mr. Marty Griffin
Mr. Richard Kimsey Jackson
Ms. Courtney Domokur
Morris Education Center
225 Rosenwald Lane
Brevard, NC 28712

Dear TCS School Board,

I am writing to you today as a member of the community, a Brevard alumni, and a current employee of Brevard Middle School in regards to voting on which plan our county will remain or move to in the coming days. This decision is an incredibly difficult one to make and I do not envy any of you as there will be frustration on both sides. I simply wish to add my voice to the case of staying on Plan B from my perspective working in my school.

Teachers in our county have been drowning for months. No teacher that I have spoken to has had an easy time this year no matter the amount of experience. We hit a turning point after January where the systems we have in place finally seemed to be working. Communal spread outside of school has gone way down since the holidays. We no longer are receiving call upon call of teachers being out, families keeping students home, and alerts that exposures may have occurred.

One of the most successful procedures that kept cluster spreads down in our schools has been social distancing. Students are no longer on top of each other in the classrooms or when they travel in the halls. Teachers have been able to help students during this incredibly difficult time because of smaller class sizes and having them physically distant in the same room. As the ISS teacher I would also like to add that this has also seemed to help with behavioral referrals/discipline because teachers can manage minor issues faster with less students. If we return to a full student body with 2 months left in the year, our teachers and students are going to be overwhelmed.

There is no possible way that any classes will be able to practice social distancing with over 25 students in a room. It is physically not possible. The majority of teachers at my school are still not fully vaccinated and if they get sick before their second dose it could jeopardize their vaccination schedule. If teachers start getting sick again, we will also be faced with a substitute shortage that has been a major issue specifically this year. Last year I covered classes less than five times while this year there were weeks I rarely saw my own desk due to there being no other person to cover. I am by no means a 'lazy person', but this year has pushed me to my breaking point on multiple occasions and has severely affected my mental and physical health. I know that I am not alone in this.

With such little time left between now and the end of the year, I have to ask this Board to vote to stay on plan B. We have finally found a rhythm that works in our school even with multiple open positions that we cannot fill. Students are more easily managed and have built important relationships with their peers and instructors. By doubling the attendance and bringing these separate groups together, during what is traditionally an already stressful time of a normal year, there will be an increase in teacher stress, discipline issues, covid cases, and loss of valuable instructional time.

Please let us finish out this year on a system that we know is working and have adapted to. Let us come back in the Fall with a great reopening plan that everyone is prepared and ready for instead of trying to blindly chuck a bowling ball down the lane and praying some pins get knocked over. We will give you our best to finish this year, but the fact remains that we need to do it safely and with the best outcomes in mind for everyone.

Warm Regards,

Jessica Compton

ISS Teacher/Remote Learning Teacher/ Media Center Assistant/ Special Education Assistant/
Substitute Teacher/ Front Office Substitute/ 'Floater'

#3

Good afternoon, I hope this email finds each of you well. I am Susan Welch, an English and sometimes Social Studies at Brevard High School. I have been teaching there for 16 years now and the students and staff are a huge part of my life. I graduated from BHS more years ago than I care to claim and returned here after the death of my husband to raise his granddaughter. I tell you this to try and give you some sense of how important BHS is to me.

I realize that the schools in Transylvania County are important to each of you and that you have tried to navigate a very difficult situation with consideration given to the best interests of the students and their families. I appreciate your efforts on behalf of each of them.

I am certain that you have made the effort to understand the impact of COVID 19 on the community but I would ask that you carefully consider the impact specifically on school staff and students. This year has been incredibly stressful for students. Mental health issues have skyrocketed and often school staff becomes students only safe and stable adult influences. The school itself becomes their safe haven. We have a routine now, we have the structure that the students crave and understand. Please do not disrupt that by a hurried return to plan A. The students are not ready for it, the staff is not ready for it and the health system in Transylvania County is not ready for it. This is especially true because of the fact that there is an expectation of another surge as per Dr. Cohen. Please remember that while all of the staff that wishes to be vaccinated should be by the time this occurs, our students will not be. Please do not put them at risk, please!

Thank you for your time

Susan Welch

#4

Transylvania county continues to have an extremely high COVID positive percentage.

Forcing our students to in person instruction will only increase these numbers. As well as putting our students, staff, educators, family members and community at risk.

With only a few weeks left of the school year, changing the entire instructional plan will not only be detrimental to the students educational continuity but unnecessarily endanger public health.

There is not appropriate spacing for 6' of social distancing, reduced class sizes, as well as Covid-safe transportation if all students were to return to plan A.

We all want the best for our children and community. A safe learning environment is paramount. I urge the school board to remain in plan B for middle and high school students. In the event that you proceed with plan A, I am hopeful you will allow those not yet comfortable with in person instruction to remain in the online learning path and continue to be a part of Transylvania County Schools.

Sarah Gallagher

#5

If we go with Plan A at the middle school level, will students currently enrolled in OLP be able to switch to Plan A and attend school in person?

Sherri Owen

#6

Dear School Board Members,

I am writing to ask you to **please continue Plan B for middle school students until the end of this academic year** (and to please consider advocating for the procedures that have worked beautifully this year and should, in my opinion, be continued in the future--I have listed them below). It has been, as you are well aware, a year like no other, and our students do not need any additional disruptions to the schedule to which they have become accustomed. With but a few weeks remaining, and the administration of standardized tests, our students need to finish out this atypical year and begin the next academic year anew.

As a long-time teacher, I have been able to observe public education changes over time. Educators seem to understand more and more the value of discovery and self-directed learning, but that can only be achieved through learner-centered design that promotes autonomy and agency. That cannot be accomplished solely through online instruction; that cannot be accomplished in a classroom with 28 students. There were a lot of challenges this year, indeed, but there have been some shining moments as well. Here is a list of what I think worked VERY well and what could feasibly improve the educational experience for students, parents, teachers, and all other stakeholders going forward.

- **Small class sizes** = individualized attention = classroom community = less disruption = more time for instruction = more engagement = better relationships
- **Lunch in classrooms** -- Never thought I'd say this (because I'm so obsessed with classroom cleanliness), but having lunch in the classroom has been a wonderful experience. Eating with my students, over an extended lunch break, has given me the opportunity to get to know them on a more personal level. I am able to connect with them in a genuine way and, as we know, genuine, behavior-influencing rapport is created organically. Eating lunch with students draws them into my realm of influence and allows us all to enjoy a more natural classroom vibe.
- **Beginning the day with an extended homeroom period** -- Instead of coming to my classroom at 7:30 and awaiting the arrival of my students at 7:45 (with the sound of a stampede down the hall and the need for teachers to be on hall duty to herd those cats), I am able to come to my classroom and greet each student individually as s/he enters. I can play soothing music to welcome them, put on a Horrible Histories video, or just chat with them to see how their evenings went. The day begins less rushed and, hence, I am more at ease--students are, too.
- **Ending the day keeping students in the classroom** -- instead of a mass exodus from the classroom after school (and, for most, into a holding area for buses, where negative behaviors can quickly escalate), students are dismissed in an orderly fashion. Those who have later buses are able to seek individualized help from me, are able to go to another teacher for assistance, can further explore a topic we are covering, or can chat and process the day. To begin and end the day calmly is invaluable.

Transylvania County Schools has long been a leader in educational advancements. I truly believe that we are concerned about how our students learn most powerfully and deeply in their lives. We believe that students learn best when they have authentic reasons for learning, when they are able to apply their knowledge to real life, when they are having fun, and when they form relationships. I, for one, would like to use this aberrant year as a learning experience for us educators. In order to do this, we need to keep our middle school schedule as is until the fall term and use the time in between to process what we, as school personnel, have learned and how to most effectively move forward.

With Great Respect,

Leah B. Hammond
Brevard Middle School
8th Grade SS

#7

I have a question for tonight's school board meeting.

As you all know, applications for the OLP must be submitted by 3/26 and are for a year-long commitment. How does the school board expect parents to make a decision regarding a full academic year in March?

We have no guidance as to what safety protocols will be in place for the upcoming school year, nor do we know if middle and high school students will be operating on an A or B schedule. There is also not a lot of information as to when a covid vaccine for children will be available. If I choose in March to put my asthmatic, rising sixth-grader into the OLP and there is a vaccine approved in, let's say, September, he will be missing out on a pivotal year in his education because a decision had to be made so early in the year.

I realize that in order to prepare for the coming year you need to know how many students plan on continuing in the OLP, but giving parents one week to make a decision in March, doesn't really give them the opportunity to make an informed decision.

Please reconsider making enrollment into the OLP either a semester decision, or give parents a little more time to make an informed decision.

Thank you,

Crystal Mortensen

#8

Good Morning,

I am sending this email to give the reasons that I am in favor of remaining on Plan B for the remainder of this school year. I am a 7th grade science teacher at Brevard Middle School with 16 years of service in the Transylvania County School System. The reasons to remain on Plan B are numerous and significant

On the current plan, we can maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet; we can clean work areas between classes; in science, we can disinfect equipment between uses; and on Fridays, we can deep-clean our rooms to prevent spread of viruses and bacteria. Even with our best efforts, we have still had exposures and outbreaks that have and will continue to impact student attendance and learning. Every single day, I am concerned for the safety and well-being of my students as well as myself.

The current Plan B also allows for 1:1 instruction due to smaller class sizes. Students can get the extra attention that they need during class or, on Fridays, we have students come to school so that they can get additional help. This time for additional instruction has been instrumental in helping students to be ready to move forward with the next topic. Unfortunately, many of our kids have large gaps in their education due to being quarantined during this ongoing pandemic.

With the inception of the Online Learning Path (OLP), we have a shortage of classroom teachers at BMS as several of our certified staff members are teaching some, if not all, of their classes online. Because of this, we have some very large science and math classes (25-31 students) in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. If all of our students who are not currently OLP return to class every day, there is absolutely no way to socially distance them as there will barely be enough room to fit desks for that many students into our classrooms. The CDC recommends social distancing of at least 6 feet for students in grades 6-12 which is a part of why we have had so few Covid clusters at our school.

Another reason we need to stay on Plan B is because changing at this point in the school year will not result in significant learning gains. It will only cause a large disruption to students and their families as it will be equivalent to beginning a new school year. Student schedules would need to be changed...again. Google Classroom set-up would need to be changed...again. Class rosters would need to be changed...again.

In my opinion, there is no compelling reason to go to Plan A at this point in the school year. 3 weeks of additional instruction before the end of grade testing begins will not gain anything but frustration and stress for our students, their families, and our staff.

Please keep these things in mind as you cast your vote this evening. As always, you are welcome in my classroom at any time to see the wonderful things that we are doing at Brevard Middle School.

Best Regards,

Lisa Smith
7th Grade Science - "The Goddess of Science"
Brevard Middle School

#9

Dear TCBOE,

Thank you for continuing to make difficult decisions regarding school opening in the pandemic. One of the reasons I love being a teacher in Transylvania County is that I feel my time is respected as much as possible, and that family life/quality of life is highly valued, along with work-life balance.

Staying open under Plan B all year, with no closures, has been quite the accomplishment. I admit, I was skeptical, and scared, to do this. But we have done it. We have not had any school-based outbreaks. We are managing in-person and online instruction and strict safety procedures that have remained consistent since August. The adapted schedule, the hypervigilance, the added workload, the added stress of students and teachers having to quarantine periodically, of being very tight in staffing numbers, of having too few substitutes, of keeping ourselves and our families well ... all teachers have a degree of exhaustion. Please do not add another element to this very difficult year, of all students coming back for the last 5 weeks of school. It is impossible to keep 3 feet of distance under these conditions. Please postpone Plan A until August 2021, when presumably everyone in the community who wants a vaccine will have had a chance to get it. We have been successful BECAUSE we have operated at a controllable, limited capacity, not in spite of it.

Thank you for listening.

Sincerely,

Carrie Morrison, M.A.T.
Exceptional Children Teacher
Brevard High School

#10

To the Board and Superintendent,

As a parent of a high school student, I would like to voice our desire to see students middle and high school back in school for in person instruction full time as soon as possible.

I feel like my student needs the structure and school environment to begin catching up on instruction, as well as the many other aspects that are positive by being at school full time. We can only help these students by getting back to normal for them.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Cindy Cochran

#11

As a member of the Rosman Community and a Teacher and Coach I wanted to express concerns about the impact that the proposed construction schedule and closure of the weight room and new gym would have on our students and community.

Many individuals in our community have invested time and money into creating a wonderful weight room that all of our students, not just athletes, can take pride in. This space is used every period of the day, easily providing needed physical activity, a huge component of lifelong health, to 100+ students a day. The new additions provide a safe environment that rivals that of many commercial facilities. The flooring and equipment represents a \$22,000 investment that was provided by the members of Toxaway Charities to benefit the students of Rosman High and Middle School. This project was a priority and undertaken because of the immediate impact and benefit for our students and our athletes. Now this equipment is scheduled to be unusable for two years due to construction. Not only will the equipment and space be unusable and our students lose the benefit, but without electricity, environmental conditions will wreak havoc on the condition of the equipment.

When it comes to the gym itself there are also concerns regarding the effect that being without power and unused will have on its condition. However, the main concern is the loss of the space that is used by so many students. The proposed schedule has two entire schools sharing one gym for physical activity. Having spent several years as a physical education teacher I know that this will present a world of problems and a huge safety concern. The suggestion of using only the old gym and the weight space at the field house as the sole spaces for physical activity are not only unsafe but they do not allow for a quality educational experience for our students.

The loss of the gym also presents many disadvantages to our students as athletes. With the two gyms we are already pressed for scheduling gym time especially during the winter season where 6 basketball teams and two wrestling teams must share the space. Eliminating the gym would force early morning and late-night practices that sacrifice time that students should be resting to prepare for the next school day. I have had many athletes that have 30+ minute drives home so commuting to and from practice later in the evening means that an athlete may not return home until well after 930 at night from practice or have to leave as early as 5AM to be on time for an AM practice. These practice times will also present many problems for students and parents working to provide transportation which has a huge potential to limit participation and will provide inequity to many of our students. Also scheduling practices around home events and school events will be almost impossible. I know that the gyms at the elementary schools have been suggested as possible locations but not only will those require bussing those gyms are not structured for competitive play and not only do they not function in the same way from a practice stand point (fewer goals, no universal clock, reduced floor dimensions, non-regulation markings) , there are also many

safety issues, (stages, unsafe floor surface, limited space around boundaries, wall protrusions, reduced floor dimensions, etc.)

Too eliminate the use and access of these facilities for such a length of time should have been an issue that was deemed unacceptable in the very initial stages of planning. We are extremely limited by the resources that we have present in the Rosman Community and to eliminate one more for such an extended period of time is to the detriment of our students, faculty, coaches, and all members of the community. The current plan is unacceptable and other alternatives should be explored to ensure that all of our students receive the best and that equality of all opportunity and experience is provided to all.

I would be glad to speak with any member of the board further about how this affects the students and community in an irreparable way. Thank you.

Joshua Galloway
Coach, Teacher, & LifeLong Tiger

#12

As a parent, it is disturbing to me to see educators in Transylvania County lobbying to keep schools closed. Please see attachment. As a mental health professional and nurse it is even more disturbing because I've already seen first-hand the negative effects of this lengthy period of isolation on my children and many others across the surrounding 23 counties that I manage. I have confidence that you all continue to have the students in Transylvania County's best interest in mind when making each and every decision! I realize we are only talking about a few more weeks of school, but those few weeks could mean the difference between pass or fail and literally life or death for students of whom you are responsible for.

Jami Reese

#13

Dear Board,

As a teacher here at BMS, I have worked constantly for my students, and of course, we all want our students back with us daily. I think Mr. Bailey has done an outstanding job of supporting his students and teachers with every possible logistical decision for safety and quality instruction.

However, my concerns for student health and the logistics of a huge change and what it means for schools at the final quarter of the year is far more daunting and challenging than the Plan B we are currently in. Transitioning students to every day will bring yet another round of changes. These would be in student schedules, no social distancing, and the plans of how to eat lunch in our classrooms safely now with 25 children in the class and how do we do temperature checks and bus schedules/distancing in the proposed Plan A scenario? These are real concerns felt by teachers that do not have answers. Google Classrooms have to be changed again to accommodate new classes and how do we distance in the hallways?

We have settled into a good structure and routine. It has taken a lot of growing pains to be in this place. With the limited time remaining, we do not have time to effectively finish instruction, review for testing, and acclimate all students back in the same classroom safely. We will lose time to clean and maintain the high standards of CDC recommendations. We will lose social distancing all together. The reason we have been so successful is because of the hard work we have put into safety and instruction. Also, as a BMS parent, as well, my student has expressed anxiety about coming all 4-5 days after he has finally adjusted to Plan B. He has high anxiety anyway and changes like this are extremely difficult.

I ask that you consider the logistics of the situation. We will now have 25+ students in some classrooms. What would be the proposal to make this work for safety and instruction for the remaining week of time?

Sincerely,

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

#14

I would like to comment on the possibility of going back to Plan A before the fall. I would like the board to consider the actual distance between students much like they did for elementary re-entry. For instance, in my class, tables would have to be returned to accommodate numbers and the minimal social distance would be about one foot apart which is indeed minimal and possibly too close according to guidelines. They also need to consider the size of combined classes given that several are over capacity and student schedules would have to be changed to accommodate Plan A (or classes moved to new locations). This would put a large burden on high school guidance as they try and register for next year and plan schedules for high school construction. Some teachers also currently have no planning periods and although they are compensated for that, they still need time to plan for more face time with students so leaving Friday an RL day should be considered. On the high school level, many students are working to help families in this economic downfall and they need time to reorganize their lives. If we have no accountability for absences, I fear many students will continue to be absent. Lastly, teacher vaccines are not yet completed and students are not yet eligible for vaccines even though their (grades 6-12) transmission rate is considered to be just as high as adults.

Overall, I think the board needs to do their due diligence in gathering pertinent information from school-level administrators but also from teachers. They need to visit schools to see how Plan B is going and what factors are impactful to Plan A.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Amy Schoenacher

#15

Dear School Board member,

I understand that you have a very difficult decision ahead of you as to whether or not we move to Plan A for the remainder of the school year. I thank you in advance for taking the time to read my concerns related to this issue, and why I do not support a switch to Plan A at this point in time.

In regards to safety, I find it difficult to justify why we would unnecessarily increase the risk to our students and staff. To do away with all social distancing measures within the classrooms is irresponsible, and creates more anxiety in a situation where many people involved still feel incredibly anxious on a day-to-day basis. With less than one quarter left before the end of the school year, I feel the focus should be on how to plan for a safe return to full in-person learning in the fall.

Logistically, I worry that not all factors are being given adequate thought and that could result in scrambling/chaos during the few weeks we have left with our students should we move to Plan A for the remainder of the year.

- **Have class sizes/schedules been discussed?** Many classes are over the number of students we would typically have in a school year due to the fact that teachers have been pulled away from the classroom to teach in the Online Learning Pathway. How will it be beneficial for students to jump to being in a class of 30 when they have become comfortable in a class of 15? Are their schedules going to change once again to balance out numbers (many had schedule/teacher changes at the start of 2nd semester)? Many teachers have noticed positive changes in regards to the extent to which we can meet the social/emotional/learning needs of students in the smaller class sizes resulting from Plan B.
- **Specifically, have EC class sizes been discussed?** I know we have one EC teacher at our school who will be over the legal limit of students allowed to be in a classroom at one time without an assistant when all students return unless more schedule changes are made. She has been down a teacher assistant, having started the year without one, and then having one quit after working less than a month.
- **Substitutes.** There is a shortage of subs, and that could intensify with a switch to Plan A. I have heard several subs state that they will not be comfortable subbing if buildings are at full capacity. Sub shortages are a problem every year, but it has been extremely difficult this year. What efforts are being made to ensure we have adequate coverage when staff is out?
- **Lunch.** This is something teachers are concerned about. We already have up to 15 students eating mask-less for 30 minutes in our rooms on any given day, which feels sketchy. It is not acceptable to expect up to 30 students to eat mask-less in a classroom where they can't be socially distanced. How will that work?
- **OLP.** Is there any plan in place to address the potential number of students who will switch to OLP in the event we go to Plan A because not all parents feel safe with this change? The constant shifting/changing of kids from OLP to in-person learning has created a lot of confusion. Just when it feels like things have been sorted out, are we really going to change them yet again?
- **Fridays.** Will we be keeping Fridays as a remote day in the event we go to Plan A? Planning periods are significantly shorter at BMS this year, and there just doesn't seem to be enough time in any day to accomplish what needs to be accomplished. Many EC teachers have already planned transition meetings for rising 6th and 9th graders...on Fridays. The idea that we could be losing our time to plan and have

meetings on Fridays is already creating a lot of anxiety for teachers, and something that needs to be decided on sooner than later.

These are just some of the logistical concerns that pop into my head that I hope you, too, are giving sufficient thought to. At this point, implementing a change to Plan A without providing adequate time to successfully execute that plan is not beneficial to students or staff. Please focus your efforts on developing a plan to safely return to full in-person learning next year, increasing teacher retention/recruiting new teachers and subs, and providing necessary resources/staff within the school to meet student needs.

Thank you for your time,

Jess Williams
Exceptional Children's Teacher
Brevard Middle School

#17

Dr. McDaris, County Commissioners, & Members of TCS School Board

The purpose of this letter is to express my concerns regarding the negative impact that losing the new gym and weight room for two years will have on the students and athletic programs at Rosman Middle and Rosman High. This is the timeframe that has been communicated to me as being what we are facing once construction begins.

The weight room just underwent an approximately \$22,000 renovation at the beginning of this school year. The funds were 100% donated by Lake Toxaway Charities and the Tiger Impact Group. This included new rubber flooring, twelve brand new weight racks, twelve barbells, and new rubber bumper plates. These funds were requested and approved on the basis of being an investment in the success of all of our students, not just the sports teams. I have serious concerns as to what will happen to this equipment if the weight room is unoccupied for an extended period of time. Currently, we have to run two dehumidifiers daily to prevent rust from excess humidity, and in the warmer months those have to be emptied twice per day. If that room were to be unoccupied, we risk losing the equipment to rust and the floor to buckling due to not being used. There is no feasible temporary storage for such a large amount of equipment, even if it is disassembled. This would be a tremendous waste of money, time, and the generosity of others. Renovations such as this do not happen often, so it would be highly unlikely that we would be able to request funding to replace the floor or the equipment. There is also the issue of leaving the gym unoccupied for that long, especially without power, leading to the buckling of the gym floor and requiring that to be replaced. As I stated previously, the cost of just the new equipment and floor in the gym was \$22,000, and that does not include the equipment that we already had that would have to be replaced. Adding that to the cost of replacing the gym floor would lead to a significant financial issue. Will there be money in some future budget to fund those items? If not, we must seriously consider how we can avoid these situations.

One often overlooked aspect of the weight room and the gym are that they are not just for the sports teams. The weight room is a four-period-per-day classroom. In fact, the new gym, the weight room, and the OCS room are the only three classrooms that are used by students for the entire school day. Between 80-100 students use the weight room during the school day. These students represent the entirety of the student population, not just student-athletes. To lose such an instructional space is unacceptable. The new gym is the primary PE classroom for the entire middle school. As it is currently set up, the current weight room can comfortably accommodate thirty-six students, and up to forty-eight in an extreme circumstance. Once we are back to school with full classes, this space will be crucial in effectively teaching our strength and conditioning classes, especially if we are still required to maintain minimal distancing as required by the latest legislation out of Raleigh. The lower weight room at the fieldhouse is a third of space of the current weight room and could only accommodate approximately 15-20 students with no possibility of even minimal distancing. This semester, for an example, if we were on option A, both the first and second period classes are at or near 40 students. This number can be housed in the current weight room fairly comfortably. There is no way they could fit safely in the lower space. Bussing to Next Level Fitness is not a viable alternative, as we would lose crucial instructional time during the day to travel. Also, Next Level is set up as a commercial gym in which individuals can do their own workouts, not a weight lifting class in which all groups are doing the same exercises over the course of the class period. Whereas we have 12 racks that can be used for squats, bench, power cleans, etc., Next Level only has one rack.

From an athletic standpoint, losing the gym and the weight room would put our sports teams at near-catastrophic competitive disadvantage. The weight room is used all summer by the football team, the volleyball team, and both basketball teams for summer conditioning. As most of our athletes are multi-sport, this benefits all of the sports teams. Strength and conditioning is the foundation of any successful athletics program, and to lose that space would be devastating. If we are down to one gym, that means that during the winter, eight teams (MS wrestling, MS girls basketball, MS boys basketball, JV girls basketball, varsity girls basketball, JV boys basketball, and varsity boys basketball) would have to use one gym for practices and games. The alternative for basketball would be to bus to either Rosman Elementary or TC Henderson Elementary. These gyms are not full size, thereby putting our athletes at a disadvantage compared to their competitors, similar to the one our track teams face not having a track readily available to practice on. This also leads to safety issues, as those gyms are set up for elementary PE, not for basketball. There isn't sufficient space and padding to ensure the safety of our student-athletes during practices. It also leads to issues with overuse of the elementary gyms, which are used for elementary PE, awards ceremonies, plays, assemblies, etc. Wrestling would also have to find a place to not only practice but to store their mats and have matches. Scheduling practices will require at least some teams to have practices at 6 AM. This is an undue burden to place on parents, players, and coaches, and presents an issue with participation, as some students will not have transportation that early in the morning and may choose not to play. To lose even a couple of players due to transportation issues and/or early morning practices is inequitable and borderline discriminatory to those students.

In conclusion, I implore you to consider all alternatives to this situation. It would be damaging to our students, the community, and a waste of the generosity that so many have provided to upgrade our facilities. I understand that there are logistics to consider, but losing the weight room and gym for two years would be the worst possible outcome and is, to speak frankly, unacceptable. In education we strive to achieve equity in all aspects for all students. Please help us combat this inequity by finding a solution to this problem.

Thank You

Dusty Robinson
Head Football Coach, Rosman High School

#18

As you find yourself on the cusp of having to make a decision in regards to our middle and high school students returning to school 4-5 days per week, I decided to reach out again with my unique perspective as a public health/school nurse and the parent of a middle schooler. Let me start by saying I do not envy the position that you are in because no matter the decision that is made you will not make everyone happy.

As the school nurse and after monitoring Covid closely for the past 7 months in Transylvania County Schools we are in a MUCH better place than we have been. Current data in our county, as well as in our state are trending downwards. We have also been able to ensure that any TCS staff member interested in receiving a Covid-19 vaccine has at least received their 1st dose, roughly 65% of education staff have participated. In Transylvania County we have also started receiving the Pfizer vaccine which is manufactured for 16-year olds and up. This will allow us the opportunity to vaccinate high school students that are in this age group that are interested in receiving the Covid-19 vaccine. My colleagues and I can also attest that Covid transmission has not occurred at school or in classrooms while control measures are in place. This has been the case even at the elementary school level where students have been attending 4 days per week and have been unable to socially distance consistently. In my school nurse role I have also seen high schoolers struggling emotionally and psychologically as they are only able to attend school 2 days per week. Many of the middle and high school students are unable to keep up with their academics virtually and are falling further and further behind which then in turn causes them more anxiety and depression.

As the mother of a middle school daughter I am so ready for her to be back in school at least 4 days a week. My husband and I have had to be very creative on the days that she is not in school to ensure that she is on task and completing her assignments on time while we both work full time jobs. She has always been a good student and we have seen her enthusiasm for learning decrease. I believe this could be quickly remedied with the opportunity to be face to face in the classroom more often than 2 days/week.

In conclusion, I will say that having middle and high school students returning at least 4 days per week will allow us good data in preparation for hopefully returning to school full time in the fall for the 21-22 school year. Thank you for your time and consideration for a transition to a modified plan A for the middle and high school students.

Sincerely,
April Owenby, RN, NCSN