



Virtual Regular Meeting Cumberland County Board of Education February 9, 2021

Superintendent Updates the Board **Good News in CCS!**

Dr. Connelly began his comments by mentioning the following recent CCS accomplishments:

Maureen Stover, a science teacher at Cumberland International Early College High School, was named a National Teacher of the Year Finalist.

Emily Stewart, a Max Abbott Middle School student, recently learned that her poem was selected to be featured nationally and published in the hardbound anthology this summer titled *A Celebration of Poets*.

CCS' Communications Team won 12 Blue Ribbon Awards for excellence in school communications from the North Carolina School Public Relations Association, which represents the top six highest number of award winners of all the districts in the State.

February Observances

Dr. Connelly declared that it is time to show our bus drivers some love through the “**Love the Bus**” campaign. Gov. Roy Cooper has also proclaimed this week as **School Bus Driver Appreciation Week**.

According to the Superintendent, during the course of a typical school year, our district has more than 400 buses that transport more than 25,000 students 26,000 miles per day. During the pandemic, CCS bus drivers are working harder than ever before and have gone above and beyond to deliver meals to students, operate Wi-Fi buses, and help with various other tasks across the district.

CCS is also celebrating **Career and Technical Education (CTE) Month**. The local CTE program offers numerous innovative course options that provide students with practical hands-on experience while incorporating meaningful applications of reading, writing and mathematics.

Dr. Connelly acknowledged that February is also **National Black History Month**, which is a time to celebrate the heritage and significant accomplishments of African-Americans that have helped make the U.S. what it is today. He shared that the district has been fortunate to educate many notable African-American individuals who have graduated and contributed so much to our society. Two such examples he shared were American rapper J.Cole (Jermaine Cole), who graduated from Terry Sanford High School, and Secretary of the N.C. Department of Public Safety Eric Hooks, who graduated from Pine Forest High School.

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Dr. Marvin Connelly

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DPI's Mental Health Personnel Report

CCS recently received a Mental Health Personnel Report from the N.C. Department of Public Instruction. In CCS, based on a comparison of payroll data on December 31, 2019, and December 31, 2020:

- The number of psychologists increased by 4.05 positions (30.10 total)
- The number of counselors increased by 3.38 positions (144.55 total)
- The number of social workers increased by 4.55 positions (71.46 total)
- The number of nurses on CCS' payroll decreased by 0.61 of a position (14.43 total, not including those on Cumberland County's payroll)

Dr. Connelly said that as the district continues to navigate through this global pandemic and work to resume in-person instruction, investing in the whole child will remain a priority. He also affirmed that the district will continue to invest in personnel to support students' diverse needs.

School Re-Entry & Vaccination Update

According to Dr. Connelly, staff members are working hard to prepare for a smooth and safe return to some in-person instruction beginning March 15 with high school **End-of-Course and CTE testing** taking place the first two weeks of March. He said that the administration will stay abreast of updates from the State regarding school re-entry. The General Assembly is debating SB 37. In this Bill, LEAs would be required to provide either Plan A or Virtual (parental choice) for all students with IEP's or 504's, and for all other students, K - 12, LEAs must provide the option of either Plan A or Plan B or some combination of A and B, or Virtual (parental choice). He vowed to keep the Board informed as he receives more updates from State officials.

Dr. Connelly explained that the administration is aware that the vaccine is one of several tools that can be used to help limit the spread of COVID-19 and give staff, students, and families a higher level of comfort about returning to in-person learning. To that end, CCS partnered with Cape Fear Valley Health to host a two-day **COVID-19 mass vaccination clinic** last week at E.E. Smith High School in an effort to increase access to the COVID-19 vaccine for individuals age 65 and older in minority and underserved populations. The event was a huge success with more than 1,300 individuals taking advantage of the opportunity to receive their first dose of vaccine. The district is working with local health officials to organize additional vaccination events specifically for educators and staff once the State moves to Group 3, which includes educators and other front-line workers; however, according to Cumberland County Health Director Dr. Jennifer Green it is uncertain as to when the State will move forward with vaccinating individuals in Group 3.

Dr. Connelly announced that in the coming days, the district will be conducting an anonymous survey to obtain information about the number of employees who have been able to access the COVID-19 vaccine. The data will be used to advocate for broader vaccine availability.

He shared that most are aware of Gov. Cooper's appeal for districts to return to in-person learning as soon as it is safe to do so and he left that decision up to local Boards of Education and LEAs based on what is happening in their respective communities, coupled with safety protocols. From there, Dr. Connelly shared the following statement:

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“COVID-19 is an evolving situation that requires constant review. We appreciate the patience of staff, students and families throughout this process. We will continue to monitor our district’s current plan and programming to ensure that we can get and keep schools open in a safe and responsible manner. All things considered, all information considered, all research considered including the data that districts in NC that have returned to in-person learning have not seen COVID-19 spread in the school environment - leads me to believe that our March 15th plan is responsible and that we should stick to our plan. I do not believe that we need to rush and expedite our plan as it is aligned to the end of the academic quarter and a natural transition point to in-person learning. Our school staff are ready with strong mitigation strategies in place for EOC/CTE testing the first week in March and execution of our K-12 plan on March 15th.”

Finally, Dr. Connelly ended his update to the Board with a video highlighting the recent vaccination clinic at E.E. Smith High School.

Board ‘Signs Off’ on Agreement between CCS, Regional Support Improvement

The Board approved the State Board of Education District and Regional Support Team (DRS Team) partnering with CCS to support the district’s efforts in school improvement. The agreement sets norms, prioritizes principles, and outlines collaborative efforts the DRS Team and CCS will adhere to and undertake to improve student achievement throughout the district. The purpose of the partnership is to support continuous improvement within CCS and provide services that will align with the district’s goals as noted in the Comprehensive Plan documented in the NCStar system. The partnership will focus on the continuous improvement process with the intent to provide the best education for all North Carolina students.

Board ‘Gives Thumbs-Up’ to Three Proclamations

The nine-member Board unanimously approved supporting the following proclamations to be observed by Cumberland County Schools:

- *CTE (Career and Technical Education) Month* -- (February 1 – 28)
- *National School Counseling Week* -- (February 1 – 5)
- *Kindness Awareness Month* – (February 1 – 28)

Proposed Employee Bonus Approved

To show appreciation to staff members who have continued to work through a challenging year of remote learning, remote teaching, and remote working, the Board voted to approve a one-time bonus of \$350 to employees who did not receive the legislative bonus in October 2020 – classified employees, administrative leadership, and support staff. This bonus will be paid from local funds at an estimated cost of \$1.8 million. The district will release payments to eligible employees, e.g., Classified Staff (Clerical, Teacher Assistants, Maintenance, Custodians, Drivers, Child Nutrition and Prime Time staff, etc.), School Leadership (Principals and Assistant Principals), Central Support and Leadership Staff, at the end of February.

Policies Accepted by Board

The following policies were approved by the Board: 5020 Visitors to Schools; 5030 Community Use of Facilities; and 7510 Leave.

Revised Policies Accepted by Board

The following revised policy was approved by the Board: 4700 – Student Records.

Board Recognitions

Betty Musselwhite, the associate superintendent of School Support Services, introduced CCS teacher Kellie Perkins to be recognized by the Board before she shared some words of gratitude.

National Grange Teacher of the Year

Perkins, a visual arts teacher at Terry Sanford High School, was recently named Teacher of the Year by the National Grange, which is the oldest agriculture and rural advocacy organization in America. The 39-year teaching veteran received this annual award because of her dedication to her subject, students, and fellow educators. At Terry Sanford High, Perkins not only teaches visual arts, but serves as the chair of the Fine and Performing Arts Department, advises the schools' National ART Honor Society as well as serves on the District's Arts Education Leadership & Curriculum Team, and the Very Special Arts Festival Planning Committee.

Board Members' Update

Through a request from several Board members, it was decided that Dr. Connelly and Board Attorney Nick Sojka will draft a letter to Gov. Cooper asking that educators be classified as essential workers so that they can receive the COVID-19 vaccination before or by March 15, the date students are slated to return to school for face-to-face instruction.

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