



ROANOKE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Family Survey Data, Analysis and Conclusions

Background Summary

June 9: RCPS announced to families and staff that, based on state's plan for Phase 3, school would re-open in August on a hybrid schedule and follow public health guidance in doing so. This announcement did not contemplate that RCPS would consider any measures short of following public health guidance. [Link to message](#)

June 25: Details of the recommended hybrid schedule were presented to the School Board. The plan recognized the goal of wanting as many students to attend in person as could be accommodated based on public health guidance, and recognized positions and concerns expressed in employee, parent, and student surveys. These positions included those who believe that schools should re-open with all students attending every day (by not following public health guidance), those who believe that a phased-in or hybrid approach following public health guidance should be implemented, and those who believe schools should re-open with all students 100% online until a vaccine for COVID-19 is available.

The plan recommended that RCPS re-open in Phase 3, following the public health guidance which would require a hybrid approach due to space, staff, and transportation limitations. Even though it would be easier to have all students on the same schedule and remain in their normal classrooms, the plan recognized that having PK-2 students attending daily is crucial to their developing foundational skills. Having PK-2 students attend daily would also help families with childcare burdens for three grade levels of children plus preschool, representing half of the elementary grades. Due to the space and staff required to have PK-2 students attend daily, the plan called for grades 3-5 to attend twice weekly in person and complete assignments online for the other three days of the week. Due to the limitations caused by class changes in middle and high school, the plan called for grades 6-12 to attend twice weekly in person and complete online assignments for the other three days of the week.

The plan emphasized the importance of surveying families as a next step to determine if enough students would want 100% online instruction and enough families could provide their own transportation to create classroom and bus capacity for the recommended plan.

- For example, if too few families could provide their own transportation, we would not have enough buses or drivers to bring in all PK-2 students every day and grades 3-12 twice per week. Instead, we would have to split grades PK-2 into two or more groups and limit daily attendance and/or split grades 3-12 into four groups and have them attend only one day per week. Conversely, if a vast majority of families (e.g. 75-80%) committed to providing their own transportation, we could consider having additional grade levels attend daily if, at the same time significant classroom space were opened up by a large number of students wanting 100% online instruction.
- Similarly, if a large enough number of students wanted 100% online instruction, more classroom space would be opened up and classes would not have to spread out as far into other areas nor need as many staff members to supervise those additional spaces. Depending on the school, a 100% online rate of approximately 30% (or more) is estimated to have a significant enough impact to free up space and staff for additional grade levels to attend daily.

New Information Since 6/25/2020

- The governor announced that Virginia would enter Phase 3 on 6/30/2020.
- On 7/1/2020, the School Board had a special work session to review status of the recommended plan, review the wording of the proposed family survey and to discuss any ideas board members had about how to add additional grade levels. Unlike previous surveys that invited comments and input on an anonymous basis, the “family survey” would consist of questions asking each family to commit to online vs in-person options as well as transportation decisions.
- On 7/2/2020, the Board heard public comment at its regular meeting held at NHS. The views reflected the views expressed in numerous emails from parents as well as teachers, citing hardships and concerns caused by not having all students attend in person everyday as well as hardships and concerns caused by reopening in any manner short of public health guidance.
- In response to reports from some public comment and emails reporting that other school divisions in Virginia had committed to having students attending in-person daily (Colonial Heights, Hampton, and Virginia Beach had been mentioned specifically), staff researched those reports and verified that those divisions had not committed to daily instruction. Rather, these divisions had announced that they, too, were committed to following public health guidance and the number of days students would attend each week depended on how many students chose 100% online instruction.
- Revised guidance for Phase 3 from VDOE and VDH issued on 7/6/2020 incorporated guidance from WHO, AAP, and CDC endorsing 3-6 ft physical distancing as long as face coverings are worn. The guidance keeps 6 ft distancing as the best standard. CDC guidance already stated that face coverings should be worn for distances less than 6 ft. This allowance provides justification for having one student per seat on buses with face coverings. Staff has determined that students should be able to wear face coverings for the duration of the bus ride and requiring them should be a condition for riding the bus. The guidance also specifically addresses the use of plexiglass shields as a good augmentation measure, but not to replace the use of face coverings and physical distancing. This was shared with the Board on 7/6/2020. [Link to VDOE/VDH guidance](#)
- On 7/8/2020, staff had a conference call with local health department officials and area superintendents. The health department reported that cases have been going down in other parts of the state but continue to rise in our area. For physical distancing, 6 ft is still the standard, with 3-6 ft being OK as long as face coverings are worn.
- On 7/10/2020, the AAP (the pediatric group), NEA, AFT, and AASA issued a joint statement clarifying that schools should re-open based on guidance from public health officials and the recommendations of educators. [Link to the statement](#)

Survey Data n= 13,441

Families were surveyed individually through online responses July 3-7 and through follow-up phone calls July 7-9, 2020.

School	Transportation Estimated Daily Bus Ridership % (assuming families commit to transportation)	100% Online Enrollment								
		K	1	2	3	4	5	Total Online	Total School Enrollment	% Online
Back Creek	37%	6	4	5	11	8	3	37	283	13%
Bonsack	38%	2	3	5	9	9	9	37	337	11%
Burlington	49%	7	6	14	9	15	19	70	395	18%
Cave Spring	34%	7	9	4	10	18	13	61	488	13%
Clearbrook	36%	7	4	5	10	9	11	46	314	15%
Cundiff	42%	7	8	9	15	15	14	68	461	15%
Fort Lewis	38%	5	3	7	1	4	4	24	237	10%
Glen Cove	47%	11	8	12	14	10	21	76	412	18%
Glenvar	38%	6	5	9	7	7	8	42	309	14%
Green Valley	47%	9	11	15	13	19	14	81	516	16%
Horn	42%	4	9	7	9	15	12	56	387	15%
Masons Cove	47%	7	6	2	4	7	7	33	182	18%
Mt. Pleasant	38%	2	2	8	9	3	10	34	258	13%
Mountain View	34%	6	1	17	9	13	7	53	279	19%
Oak Grove	38%	5	11	17	3	12	8	56	381	15%
Penn Forest	37%	10	6	7	2	15	8	48	416	12%
		6	7	8						
Cave Spring MS	28%	37	43	51				131	783	17%
Glenvar MS	28%	25	25	21				71	451	16%
Hidden Valley MS	26%	33	31	41				105	606	17%
Northside MS	30%	41	40	59				140	663	21%
William Byrd MS	30%	36	52	46				134	834	16%
		9	10	11	12					
Cave Spring HS	19%	34	31	40	35			140	980	14%
Glenvar HS	17%	20	25	28	23			96	627	15%
Hidden Valley HS	16%	30	37	33	40			140	792	18%
Northside HS	24%	63	48	54	39			204	916	23%
William Byrd HS	23%	50	56	50	43			199	1095	18%

Analysis

The Background Summary on page 1 of this report reviews the rationale for using transportation data and data regarding students who will want 100% online instruction to aid decision making. Both of these data points are critical for understanding the capacity of our classrooms and our buses while following public health guidance. The table above represents the summary of those data.

Transportation

For the question of determining what percentage of families could commit to providing transportation for as long as needed, all students who indicated that they wanted 100% online instruction were removed from this

portion of the data set. For elementary schools, the remaining students were divided between grades PK-2 (i.e. those who, under the recommended plan, would need daily transportation) and grades 3-5 (i.e. those who, under the recommended plan, would need transportation two days per week). All students in grade PK-2 who did not indicate that they could provide their own transportation were included in the daily count. Since approximately half of students in grades 3-5 would attend in person each day, only half of the students in those grades who did not indicate that they could provide their own transportation were included in the daily count. The same methodology used for grades 3-5 was used for middle and high schools. An estimated daily percentage of ridership was then calculated for each school. These percentages are deemed as estimates given that some families may still change their mind and our actual enrollment numbers are typically fluid until a few weeks into the school year,

An analysis of the transportation data yields the following observations:

- Among the middle and high schools, where students typically sit one to two students per seat, depending on the bus route, the estimated daily ridership ranges from a low of 16% for Hidden Valley HS to a high of 30% each for Northside and William Byrd MS. One variable to include is that Hidden Valley schools have separate bus runs for middle and high school due to the distance between those schools. The other middle and high schools have combined bus routes. Nevertheless, given that all the daily ridership data are at well under 50%, we anticipate no significant obstacles to transporting middle and high school students two days per week assuming approximately 50% of those students attend in person each day. We should be able to absorb new students and those who change their mind about riding the bus, as long as we stay well under 50%.
- Among the elementary schools, where students typically sit two to a seat and, often, three to a seat, the estimated daily bus ridership ranges from a low of 34% each for Cave Spring and Mountain View to a high of 49% for Burlington. Five other schools report at over 40%: Cundiff (42%), Glen Cove (47%), Green Valley (47%), Horn (42%), and Masons Cove (47%). All other elementary schools report between 34 and 39% ridership.
- The fact that all schools report an estimated daily ridership of less than 50% is an overall positive outcome for being able to implement the recommended plan. There will be obstacles to overcome, however, which will require additional funding to add bus routes as needed. For bus routes that previously have had many students sitting three to a seat, but now can only have one student per seat (wearing a face covering), ridership of 35-49% will meet or exceed capacity under the recommended plan. Having grades PK-2 attend in person daily will be a challenge and will likely require additional funding, if the data reported by parents hold firm. There may be little flexibility to add many more students whose parents change their mind about being able to provide their own transportation.
- There seems to be no extra capacity from a transportation standpoint to have additional grade levels attend in person daily.
- It is also noted that we have bus routes in the Catawba and Bent Mountain areas that have one bus transporting elementary and secondary students which may need to be taken into consideration for possibly changing or adding some bus routes.

Classroom Capacity (Opt-in / Opt-out)

For the question of determining classroom and school capacity to accommodate students in grades 3-12 for two or more days per week, the most relevant data point is to know what percentage of students will “opt-out” of in-person instruction and participate in 100% online instruction instead. This was a simple calculation done by grade level for each school.

To understand the target percentage of students who would need to opt for 100% online instruction in order to significantly free up space and staff for more grade levels to attend daily, consider that class sizes average between 18-24, depending on the grade level and the school. In order to observe physical distancing guidance requiring approximately 6 ft unless face coverings are worn, classroom capacity is capped at approximately 12-13 students. This would require an estimated range of 34-50% of students to “opt out” in order to stay within the confines of the classroom.

An analysis the 100% online (opt-out) data yields the following observations:

- For elementary schools, the percentage of students opting for 100% online instruction ranges from a low of 10% for Fort Lewis to a high of 19% at Mountain View. Three schools report at 18% each: Masons Cove, Burlington, and Glen Cove.
- For middle schools, the percentage of students opting for 100% online instruction ranges from a low of 16% each at Glenvar and William Byrd to a high of 21% for Northside.
- For high schools, the percentage of students opting for 100% online instruction ranges from a low of 14% at Cave Spring to a high of 23% for Northside.
- None of the data approaches a target level of 30% or more, especially at the elementary level.

Conclusions

Although risks and challenges remain for moving ahead with the plan recommended on June 25, the overall data support moving forward with the recommendation. The recommendation is based on the following rationale:

- There are health and safety risks involved for students and employees to return to school in person in large numbers as recommended in the plan. As public health experts have advised, there is no such thing as completely eliminating risk related to COVID-19, but, by following public health guidance, we can lower the risk and open in a responsible manner as allowed in Phase 3.
- The risks of not having students engaged back in school and remaining completely out of school for an extended period of time must be taken into account in any consideration of not having students return to school at all.
- In order to have them attend every day, students in grades PK-2 will be spread out among multiple spaces and among multiple staff members supervising and working with students in those spaces. Having groups in spaces like the cafeteria or library and having different staff members supervise those groups will not be an ideal or “normal” academic situation. However, given a choice between having PK-2 students (our least independent) learn in school every day in less than ideal circumstances and having them only attend two days per week during these most formative years, the better choice for most students is to have them in school.
- There are clear challenges to asking teachers to plan and implement in-person as well as online learning. We wish there were space and staff to accommodate more than 50% of students in person each day. We have capable teachers, though, and we have the resources needed to help our students progress academically and rise to the challenge.
- There are financial risks involved in promising to provide daily instruction for PK-2 students and providing transportation for all the families who need it. We will likely need to add bus routes and additional financial resources will be needed.
- The transportation data support having grades PK-2 attend each day, despite the financial risk and challenges. Neither the transportation nor “opt out” data support being able to add more grade levels daily.
- Teachers and other staff are very likely to be out either sick, symptomatic, or quarantined at a rate that far exceeds a normal year and potentially be out for longer periods of time. In a normal year, there is a shortage of substitutes. When a school does not have a substitute available, other staff members have to cover throughout the day. In the recommended plan of having PK-2 attend daily, the school’s ability to provide coverage will be compromised. Any expansion beyond PK-2, will make coverage unrealistic.
- Keeping in mind that the universal guidance among CDC, VDH, VDOE and AAP is that physical distancing of 6 ft should be maintained to the extent possible, unless wearing a face covering, the only remaining question then becomes whether to require students to wear face coverings most of the day in order to safely shorten the distances. Our conclusion is that for short durations (such as the duration of a bus ride) it is realistic and reasonable to answer “yes”. The consensus of the elementary principals about whether it is realistic to force elementary students to wear face coverings most of the time in class is “no”. Therefore, we need to plan for 6 ft physical distancing.