



Board-to-Board, August 2021

A monthly report from the Albemarle County School Board to the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors

Albemarle County Public Schools Will Continue to Require Masks in Schools—Following recommendations from public health experts and the latest data showing increases in local transmission of the Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus, Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) said there will be no change in its current [mask policy](#) when the new school year begins on August 23.

Revisions made to the policy at the School Board's July 8 meeting remain in place. Masks are required of all students, staff and visitors in schools, offices, and other school division facilities when students are present. Masks are not required to be worn by students or staff during outdoor activities.

Separately, the school division said that families will have an additional week in which they can make changes to prior decisions on how their children will attend school in the new year. By contacting their child's principal, families can change their decision for either in-person or virtual attendance.

The most current health report from the Blue Ridge Health District shows that the COVID-19 case incidence rate (seven-day total) for Albemarle County, which was zero on July 8, has risen to the highest rate in recent months. The percentage of positive tests for the virus also continues to rise. Health experts have described the Delta variant of the disease to be 60 times more transmissible than the Alpha variant that preceded it.

Recently, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the nation's leading public health experts of child health, recommended masks be worn by all students in the new school year. This week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) made the same recommendation. The Commonwealth's Blue Ridge Health District and local pediatricians who have been advising the school division also support universal masking when schools reopen.

The health district noted that a vaccine has not yet been approved for children younger than 12 years of age and that students will be inside for several hours during the school day. Both younger and older children go home to adults vulnerable to virus transmission, including grandparents who often serve as caregivers.

One hopeful sign has been local vaccination rates for youth between the ages of 12 and 17. To date in Albemarle County, nearly two out of three youths between the ages of 12 and 15, or

65.6%, have been vaccinated, as have three out of four youths, or 74.1%, of those 16 to 17 years of age.

Children who are vaccinated will not be required to quarantine at home if they are exposed to a person who tests positive for the virus or displays viral symptoms.

A change in CDC guidance also provides that in the K-12 indoor classroom setting, the close contact definition now excludes students who were within three to six feet of an infected student if both students were engaged in consistent and correct use of well-fitting face masks and other K-12 school prevention strategies (such as universal and correct mask use, physical distancing, and increased ventilation) were in place. This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in an indoor classroom setting.

Fully vaccinated, asymptomatic individuals do not need to quarantine.

School Board Adopts Vaccination or Testing Requirements of All Employees—Finding that there exists a health emergency that “requires action to safeguard students and staff against the risks of infection, illness, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19,” the Albemarle County School Board this evening adopted Emergency Order No. 21-3, issued on recently for county government employees by County Executive Jeff Richardson. The board’s action extends the Emergency Order’s vaccination or testing requirements for local government employees to all school division employees.

In its resolution, the school board said it “has a substantial public interest in protecting the health and safety of its students, staff, and community and ensuring that the school division can provide staff and students with a safe and effective educational environment that supports student achievement.”

It described employees as “essential to the efficient education of all students and their social and emotional well-being,” adding that the recent presence of the COVID-19 Delta variant has led to a surge in which 90% of infections are occurring in individuals who have not been vaccinated against COVID-19.

The county executive’s emergency order requires all local government employees to submit proof of full COVID-19 vaccination by September 15 or to submit a negative COVID-19 test each week. Richardson noted in a news release, “As a local government, we have a dual responsibility of protecting our workforce and the community we serve. With data on the transmissibility of the Delta variant, we feel the best way to ensure we maintain government services is to require our staff to either be vaccinated or to undergo weekly COVID-19 testing.”

In a resolution adopted during its meeting, the school board directed the division to “work in partnership with the County of Albemarle in the implementation of Order 21-3 in order to control the spread of COVID-19 in the school division and community.”

In Albemarle County, the Blue Ridge Health District reports that 78.2% of youths between the ages of 12 and 15 have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and 68.5% are fully

vaccinated. Among youths ages 16 and 17, 83% have received at least one dose of the vaccine and 76% are fully vaccinated.

Vaccination rates in the county among adults who have received one vaccine dose range from 57% for those between the ages of 18 and 24 to as high as 92% for people between the ages of 65 and 84. Among adults between the ages of 18 and 24, 51.4% are fully vaccinated and more than 80% of those in the 65 to 84 age group also are fully vaccinated.

Following the board's August 12 action, the school division will develop a process for how the resolution's vaccine and testing requirements will be implemented.

The school board also delegated to Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Matthew Haas, the authority to implement and modify vaccination and testing procedures based upon changing conditions and in accordance with the requirements of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Virginia Department of Health, the Blue Ridge Health District, and other applicable health authorities.

ACPS Introduces a New Mass Communication System Called BrightArrow—Among the school division's most important responsibilities is sharing valuable and timely information with school families, students and staff. For a number of years, ACPS has used the Blackboard Connect mass communication system to reach stakeholders through email, phone and text messaging. In a short while, however, the contract with this company will come to an end. Earlier this year, a team of school leaders and technology, communications and ESOL professionals worked together to evaluate proposals from 11 different mass communication companies. Ultimately, we selected BrightArrow's Mass Notification Solution for PowerSchool as the best choice to meet ACPS communication needs.

Here are some highlights of BrightArrow's capabilities:

- Messages can be composed and sent directly from PowerSchool, through the BrightArrow web application, or through a mobile app.
- Staff with appropriate permissions can easily send messages (via email, phone and/or text) to students, families or both. Teachers can create lists and send messages through PowerTeacher to their students, families, or both.
- Families can set their communication preferences from within the PowerSchool Public (Parent) Portal.
- Text and email messages can be translated automatically into more than 100 different languages, based upon the language preferences selected by families in PowerSchool.
- Voice messages can be translated automatically into more than 20 different languages also based upon the language preferences selected in PowerSchool.
- The system features [BrightChat](#), a secure two-way communication option for use between a staff member (such as a teacher or athletic coach) and a student, a family member, a class, or a team. The system can be monitored by building administration.
- Text messages are not limited in length.
- Communications can be sent to audiences based upon PowerSchool data and the specific interests of each audience.

In preparation for the transition to BrightArrow, the division has assembled a cross-functional steering committee to inform implementation, including timeline, settings, training, and communication norms and best practices.

School Board Approves Journey as New Name for Jouett Middle School; Broadus Wood Is Next School to Have Its Name Reviewed—At its August 12 meeting, the Albemarle County School Board approved the recommendations of the superintendent, Dr. Matthew Haas, and a volunteer community advisory committee that Jouett Middle School should be renamed Journey, effective July 1, 2022. The action by the board completed a process that began in April when the community advisory committee was first appointed by the superintendent. The committee conducted two online surveys and two community information meetings before recommending Journey to Dr. Haas.

The community advisory committee included seven parents, six staff members, two residents of the community who do not have a child currently attending the school, and a Jouett graduate who is now a student at Albemarle High School. In her presentation to the school board, the committee chair, Hannah Peters, who is also a teacher at the middle school, especially noted the participation of students in the naming review.

Later in the school board meeting, Haas said that Broadus Wood Elementary School would be the next school to undergo a naming review. This will be the sixth school named for an individual in the division that will participate in the process. The board has directed the superintendent to conduct naming reviews of all 14 schools in the division that are named for individuals. The board's naming review policy requires that all schools named for individuals represent the school division's values of equity, excellence, family and community, and wellness.

Broadus Wood is named for a local farmer, Broadus Ira Wood, who in 1905 donated the land for the school. At one time, Broadus Wood was part of Earlysville High School. The building was destroyed in a fire and rebuilt as Broadus Wood. It became an elementary school in 1953 when Albemarle High School opened.

Broadus Wood's principal, Amy Morris, said the school's naming review committee will be co-chaired by two members of the staff: Katie Breaud, who serves the school as a talent development resource teacher, and Ray Chrobak, the school librarian. Morris has invited community and staff members to serve on the advisory committee, which, in addition to the principal and co-chairs, must include at least three parents, two community members who do not have children in the school, and three staff members. Those interested in serving are asked to send an email expressing the nature of their interest to SchoolNamingReview@k12albemarle.org.

Included in the Broadus Wood committee's work will be the design of as many as two online community surveys and up to two community meetings to discuss survey results. If the committee decides to consider the school's current name as a finalist in its deliberations, it will conduct research on Mr. Wood's contributions to the community and on whether his personal and professional conduct exemplifies the school division's values. Eventually, the committee

will make a recommendation to Haas, who will consider the recommendation and advise the school board on the school's name. If there is a name change, the new name would take effect on July 1, 2022.

The five previous school naming reviews also were conducted by volunteer community advisory committees, and in each instance, the superintendent supported the committee's recommendation. The school board has changed the name of four schools and retained the name of another. Summaries of all completed reviews and those in progress are maintained on the school division's [School Names Under Review](#) web page.