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To: Cumberland County Board of Education

From: Marvin Connelly, Ed.D., Superintendent

Date: July 21, 2020

Re: Recommendation for 2020-2021 School Opening

On July 9, 2020, the Board approved 2020-2021 school reopening framework options and framework decisions – (Plan A – Traditional Face-to-Face Learning with Minimal Social Distancing; Plan B – Blended-Remote and Face-to-Face Learning; and Plan C – Total Remote Learning) – pending the decision from Governor Roy Cooper. Since that time, Governor Cooper has granted local Boards of Education the option to choose either Plan B or Plan C, based on local conditions.

The administration seeks the Board's approval to adopt Plan C (Total Remote Learning) for the opening of the 2020-2021 school year, as allowed by the Governor's July 14, 2020, announcement regarding schools.

The administration's recommendation to adopt Plan C is based on the following:

- **Stakeholder Feedback:** Employees, families and community stakeholders have voiced concerns about safety risks associated with moving forward with Plan B. We have also heard feedback from the Cumberland County Association of Educators and the Cumberland County Chapter of the NAACP, requesting that we open virtually at this time.
- **Re-Entry Enrollment Trends:** Based on the options offered under Plan B, 53.2 percent of students have been enrolled in remote learning options (The Remote Learning Full-Time Experience at Current School or Cumberland Academy), and 46.8 percent of students have been enrolled in the Blended In-Person Learning Experience.
- **Staff Interest in Cumberland Academy and Alternative Work Assignments:** More than 700 staff members have applied to work at the Cumberland Academy (K-12 Virtual School). Many staff members have also reached out to Human Resources regarding alternative work assignments due to personal health circumstances, health conditions of a close relative, family circumstances, and personal concerns about their own health and safety.
- **Preparedness for Remote Learning:** Approximately 6,500 devices were deployed during the emergency closure. This fall, the district will provide a loaned device to each student in grades K-12. Other measures are underway to narrow the gap with connectivity. If we move forward with Plan C, we will work to maximize student engagement and provide

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high-quality remote learning experiences for every child. Teachers will be expected to provide instruction from a professional environment each day and will be allowed to use their classrooms to facilitate lessons. Individuals who are unable to do so will work with their respective principals on alternative plans and options. School is back in session on August 17, and we want everyone to take learning seriously. We will be assessing student work and providing feedback and grades on student work.

- **Plan C Orientation:** The district is exploring ways to provide multiple student orientation options and device pick-up opportunities to prepare students to engage in robust, standards-aligned remote learning experiences at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year.
- **COVID-19 Trends in North Carolina:** As of July 19, 2020, there have been 99,778 confirmed COVID-19 cases in North Carolina and 1,634 deaths. The number of COVID-19 cases is trending upward at an alarming rate in North Carolina, including Cumberland County and surrounding areas.
- **CDC Recommendations:** The CDC recommends that before considering opening schools, there should be a 14-day period of declining cases. That is not the case in either North Carolina or Cumberland County. While some medical experts have noted that younger individuals, particularly young children, do not easily become infected and rarely infect other people, there are counter arguments to this claim. At this time, the district does not have access to a research study to confirm which is correct. Given the uncertain state of the science regarding COVID-19 and young children and adolescents and the current upward trend of COVID-19 cases in Cumberland County, it is necessary to adopt Plan C for the opening of the 2020-2021 school year in order to ensure the health and safety of Cumberland County Schools students.
- **Local Health Department Guidance:** After discussing COVID-19 trends with the Cumberland County Health Director, Dr. Jennifer Green, we have learned that the virus spread metrics are trending in the wrong direction in Cumberland County. As of Friday, July 17, Cumberland County's case count was 1,849 and there had been 47 deaths. With a focus on student and staff safety, Dr. Green and I have discussed a school re-entry process that would allow all CCS schools to reopen remotely (Plan C), eventually moving to Plan B (Blended-Remote and Face-to-Face Learning), and ultimately arriving back to a sense of normalcy – Plan A (Traditional Face-to-Face Learning with Minimal Social Distancing) once receiving approval from the state. Ideally, we need a two-week consistent decline in the spread of the virus and no greater than an increase of 7 percent. With this in mind, I am recommending that we begin the 2020-2021 school year on August 17 for at least six weeks under Plan C, reassessing the situation every three weeks to determine the appropriate time to transition to Plan B.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: That the Cumberland County Board of Education adopt a motion to open the 2020-2021 school year under Plan C and to operate under Plan C for at least six (6) weeks, through at least September 25, 2020, and to subsequently operate under Plan B, beginning no earlier than September 28, 2020, provided that the Director of the Cumberland County Department of Public Health confirms that COVID-19 conditions have improved sufficiently in Cumberland County such that Plan B can be safely implemented. The Superintendent shall request approval from the Board to continue operating under Plan C beyond September 25, 2020.