

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION
MINUTES**

September 22, 2021

The Montgomery County Board of Education convened in a special called meeting on Wednesday, September 22, 2021 at 5:30 pm in the Montgomery County Central Office Boardroom. Board members present were Steven W. DeBerry – Chair, Bryan Dozier, Lynn Epps, Jesse Hill, and Cindy Taylor. Tommy Blake was absent.

Chairman Steve DeBerry called the meeting to order and moved to adopt the agenda as shown. Bryan Dozier made the motion with Jesse Hill seconding. The agenda was accepted with unanimous approval from the board with correction there would be no closed session.

Chairman DeBerry explained the purpose of this special called meeting was to review the process of redistricting based on the 2020 census. Chairman DeBerry called upon Dr. Dale Ellis who introduced Marshall Hurley an attorney in Greensboro and Bill Gilkeson a long-time attorney with expertise in map drawing for their presentation. Both presenters work with Local Redistricting Service. Marshall Hurley started by explaining. They are an organization seeking to help local boards and school boards with redistricting. The data from the 2020 census was delayed. Together they discussed a timeline with the board to help meet the deadlines needed in the process. Their service provides nonpartisan redistricting expertise for local governments committed to an open and transparent process. Mr. Hurley explained why redistricting is important. Redistricting is based on the constitutional principle of one-person one-vote. The relative voting strength of all voters in a town should be close to identical. Redistricting is required after the return of a census if two or more criteria are met. True electoral districts in your elections (criteria met); and your current districts are not within +/- 5% of the ideal ward population using the 2020 census data. Bill Gilkeson explained that our county had lost around 2,000 people from the 2020 census to the 2021 census. Population changes shown in the 2020 census results produce a new ideal district size for the Montgomery County Board of Education. Data shared as follows: 2010 total county population = 27,789, 2020 total county population = 25,751 (-7.33%), ideal district size = 3,679, permissible variation = 184 (\pm 5%), permissible range = 3,495 to 3,863. Mr. Marshall explained our ideal district size is 3,679 for each district, however, we could fluctuate 5% above or below. Bill Gilkeson explained with our numbers districts 1, 3 and 7 would require the majority of change with districts 2, 4, 5 and 6 requiring minimal change. He explained this would be a manageable task. Mr. Gilkeson will work on options to bring back to the board. With our help, you as the Board of Education are responsible for the process. You do not need authority or permission from anyone to embark on the process. You do not need approval from anyone other than yourselves to finalize the process. Mr. Marshall proposed the following dates as a timeline to meet deadlines. September 22, 2021 Introductory presentation to the Board, October Special Meeting Review of map proposals in open meeting, November 1, 2021 Public Hearing for adoption of new district map Dec. 6 – 12, 2021 Candidate filing period. Board member Bryan Dozier asked when changes would come into effect. Mr. Marshall explained once the board adopts the change. The goal date would be our November 1 board meeting. Mr. Marshall discussed redistricting criteria as follows: Population equality (within \pm 5% is required, but it can also be prioritized to make the deviation even smaller, or to take anticipated growth into account). Consideration of the Voting Rights Act, Contiguity, understanding that satellite areas will be exceptions. Preserving administrative areas intact (if chosen, should specify which: e.g., precincts, central business district). Preserving communities of interest (can be neighborhoods, or other areas with shared demographic, cultural, historic, or economic characteristics. These can be more nebulous and often defined with a

public engagement process.). Following major physical features as boundaries when possible (e.g., major roads, railroad tracks, waterbodies). Taking into account post-census development and population growth when balancing populations of districts (all still must be within $\pm 5\%$ of average based on 2020 census figures). Compactness of districts. Preservation of the cores of existing districts. Avoiding the pairing of incumbents in the same district. Bryan Dozier asked for demographic percentages based on race and ethnicity. Bill Gilkeson stated that is possible but could not base on political bias. Steve DeBerry stated we need this data to keep districts 5 and 7 as minority for election purposes. Steve DeBerry said it is his opinion to make as little change as possible to keep balance. The board requested not to have incumbents in the same district. Dr. Ellis will provide the firm with the boards domicile addresses. The board requested flexibility for the potential growth in district one be considered in the redistricting plan without having to split housing developments. Mr. Marshall thanked the board for their information and feedback. They will bring back proposals in a few weeks. The firm will handle any questions with Dr. Ellis directly as direct contact with board members is not allowed.

Chairman DeBerry called upon Dr. Ellis for Employee Vaccination Testing Data. Dr. Ellis began by saying he had called around to see what other districts are doing. The most publicized county to start requiring proof of vaccinations or required testing is Charlotte-Mecklenburg. They have just started this process for employees. There are very few talking about testing and no one is requiring students. A few districts had started the talks of requiring proof for students but received backlash. Enforcing mask mandates has become enough of a fight. You do not hear a lot about student testing. However, we are starting to hear more about employee testing. The county of Mecklenburg had to suspend 500 employees last week for not providing a test. I do not think it would come to that. We do not have 500 employees and I think if we had to suspend 25 on some days, I do not think our buses would run. The vast majority of superintendents that I have talked to are taking a very cautious wait and see approach. As long as we can keep our kids in school, that is the primary thing. I would be happy to do more research and try to have some type of recommendation for you at the October board meeting. I have talked to my staff and if we implement that sort of thing, it will take four weeks to get it going. My concern is that if we add one more thing to our nurses. They may start quitting. So after doing a lot of talking and research unless you tell me differently I hesitate doing anything more than masks right now. However, I work at the pleasure of the board. I think it will continue to be a fight to make that recommendation every month. I did a lot of talking and research and there are many good people in this state worn out. I am just really scared right now to add anymore to their plate. I am happy to entertain anything the board wants to do. Bryan Dozier asked if numbers continue to increase will we have to start requiring proof of vaccine or required testing. Dr. Ellis replied we are hoping to see how it goes with the larger districts like Charlotte-Mecklenburg and Raleigh. Most districts are waiting to see what the kick back is going to be in those counties. The good news is the ICU is up but it is starting to plateau, a little which is a good sign. I hope that it will start going back down with cooler weather. Bryan Dozier shared he had read that 30% of new cases are high schoolers or younger. Dr. Ellis said they are working on vaccines for ages 5-12, not that we are requiring it. Getting more kids vaccinated will help as well. I will be happy to head in the direction you want me to go. Steve DeBerry stated his opinion is to take the cautious wait and see approach. Lynn Epps and Anne Evans agreed with Mr. DeBerry. Dr. Ellis will continue his talks with other districts and if there are changes he will let them know. I appreciate your guidance. It is a tough time right now. With our numbers, we will continue to wear masks and it will continue to be a fight. I wish people would accept it. It is bad when the governor has to ask the public to be civil at school board meetings. That is where we are as a country right now. Anne Evans asked if there is anything more we can do. To educate the public on the benefit of vaccines. Some have done their research and some have not. Lynn Epps cautioned the board about too much pressure coming from teachers and principals on

students. She has had complaints from parents saying their child feels pressure from the school. Dr. Ellis offered to send a letter home to parents. Steve DeBerry stated the Montgomery Herald is our only source to get information out to families. You cannot always believe what you see on social media. Bryan Dozier suggested sending a call out to parents letting them know of locations and times of free COVID shots. Cindy Taylor asked about the liaison through FirstHealth. Dr. Ellis said they have posted the position. It will take some pressure from us. Jesse Hill asked if we had a list of employees who had received the shot. Dr. Ellis said he would like to send out an anonymous survey just asking employees if they had the shot so he could provide that percentage. It was the consensus of the board to take the cautious wait and see approach regarding the proof of vaccination or required testing.

Chairman DeBerry asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Bryan Dozier made a motion with a second by Lynn Epps the meeting was duly adjourned.

The next regular meeting will be Monday, October 4, 2021 at 6:30 pm in the Montgomery County Central Office Boardroom.

Steven W. DeBerry, Chairman

Dale Ellis, Ed. D., Secretary