

February 16, 2021

Public Comments from Phillip Hawkins, Jr. about Considering and Planning to Return to In Person Instruction March 15, 2021 to the Norfolk School Board

Wednesday, February 17, 2020 4:00 PM.

Good Evening School Board Chair Dr. Martin, Vice Chair Mr. Jordan, Members of the Norfolk School Board, Superintendent Dr. Byrdsong, and the NPS Administrative Team.

My name is Phillip Hawkins, Jr. I am a Pre-K4/early childhood/elementary education teacher/Grade Level Chair at the P.B. Young Sr. Elementary School with 23 years of experience all with Norfolk Public Schools. I am also a member of the Norfolk Public Schools Educational Planning Steering Committee. Tonight I am here to speak as an individual at this public hearing to express that I am very concerned that Norfolk Public Schools plan to return to in person instruction may not be ready to execute on March 15th to meet the expectations of the Governor. A large part of my concerns come from the reality that many of our school facilities are still in poor condition, and are not ready to keep our students and staff safe from COVID-19, which will have a direct and significant impact on NPS's ability to provide the high level of quality instruction that is required and needed with safety as our number one priority for our students and staff.

Here are additional highlights to my recorded comments from tonight's budget public hearing:

I am asking the Norfolk School Board and the NPS Administration to continue to include all stakeholder groups in the preparation and planning to reopen schools possibly by 4th quarter (April 19, 2021) after spring break. This will allow more time for more community members and school employees to get vaccinated and for the schools to improve the school facilities and fully prepare them to meet CDC guidelines for full mitigation, cleaning so that teaching can take place safely.

There is a long list of concerns but here are a few to consider:

- Follow the newest CDC Guidelines for Returning to In Person Instruction – If in the Red Zone we cannot go back yet while we are still not at 75-80% herd immunity with vaccinations.
- Increase and expand vaccinations in Phase 1B for the families of our NPS children and staff who live in the same household.

- School ventilation
- PPE and Replenishment
- Contactless sinks needed/portable sinks needed
- Additional Restrooms needed
- Additional part time staff needed to do only mitigation and cleaning daily while teachers and teacher assistants teach students
- More devices and teaching supplies needed in school
- More flexibility needed with staff who may need to delay getting vaccinated (Options to remain virtual)
- Options for students and families to remain virtual or go hybrid
- Training staff needed and support to get classrooms ready for CDC guidelines
- Buildings have mold/moisture issues
- There should be a maximum time of 45 minutes for remote students to be on live Zoom then the rest of the school day should be Asynchronous-remote assignments
- There should be equity, access and opportunity for standardized delivery of all resources for all schools, students and staff.
- Reopening guidelines should be shared with all NPS staff at the same time and allow feedback and input.
- Additional parent and staff surveys should go out to learn more about what family needs are in advance of decision making.
- All NPS staff should receive a 5% raise next year and an immediate stipend bonus to each full and part time employee of NPS from COVID-19 Cares Act Funding from the Government.

We must ask the City to provide full funding to protect and increase staffing at the school building level in every Norfolk Public School. Furthermore, adequate school staffing and employee salaries must now be aligned with the needs of our school facilities in the post-COVID-19 hybrid-remote learning virtual world that will require a laser light focus on health and safe facilities.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Mr. Hawkins

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