

School Decision...from Page 1A

said. "If you choose face-to-face, we're glad to have them back, because we miss them."

"There is a huge parental choice factor here, and people have to make (their own) decisions. Whatever decision you make, you do not need to criticize your fellow man for choosing another option."

In a survey sent by the school system to all parents and guardians, 80 percent of parents said their child would attend live school if available during the fall. According to Hill, the survey saw a 94-percent participation rate from parents.

Faculty and staff were overwhelmingly in favor of a brick-and-mortar education as well, with 83 percent of school employees balking at online learning given the option.

When questioned about the four-day in-school/one-day virtual proposal for the upcoming year, Union County faculty approved the measure at a 78-percent clip, with only 22 percent of staff endorsing a traditional five-day school week.

"The parents want their kids back in school, and the vast majority of our staff want to be in school; and luckily, those two pieces line up," Hill said. "We've all seen on the news what happens when those two pieces don't line up - (that's when) you have problems. But they're very closely aligned, and that's a blessing."

In another survey, 80 percent of school employees backed a controlled "Meet Your Teacher" day next month. Hill and the school board discussed the possibility of hosting one grade at a time to limit the number of visitors to each building.

On the hot-button issue of facial coverings, Hill explained that masks were strongly recommended for staff and students but not required. He also noted that social distancing is preferred but will not be mandatory, citing the logistics of separating kids in classrooms already at or near capacity.

"I didn't really know much about masks, and I'm not a doctor, but I wore a mask and I didn't catch COVID," Hill said. "I worked with somebody for 10 hours (who ended up testing positive), sitting right beside them."

"So, I'm going to wear

the mask, but you make up your own mind. I'm not going to get into an argument with parents. It's your choice, and you make up your own minds."

The superintendent said lunchrooms would be at 33-percent capacity, with remaining students likely eating in the classroom or weather-permitting outdoors. The use of the cafeteria will rotate throughout the school year, Hill said.

With or without symptoms, if a child tests positive for COVID-19, he or she must stay home for at least 10 days from a positive result or onset of symptoms, and "be fever free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication AND have improvement in respiratory symptoms."

"Students who exhibit no symptoms but have been exposed to a positive case will need to stay on a 14-day quarantine," the reopening plan says. "If symptoms develop, further time in quarantine will be needed from the onset of symptoms."

Also according to the plan available at ucschools.org, online learning students must: check Google Classroom daily during school hours; check school emails daily; attend classes remotely as required by teachers; complete/submit assignments as due; understand that teachers may not be immediately available outside of school hours but will respond to requests for assistance in a timely manner.

Face-to-face students must follow the same online procedures on Fridays as full-time online learners, with the understanding that there might be closures during the week for either inclement weather or health/safety concerns causing the need for additional online learning.

In-person students must maintain their assigned seating in classrooms - critical for contact tracing - and Chromebooks and chargers must be transported to and from school daily.

"During this uncertain time, extra effort will be given to help students with make-up assignments due to absences in order to avoid negative impacts on students' learning," the plan says. "However, for those families choosing traditional face-to-face instruction, it is the student's/family's responsibility

to contact the teacher to notify them when a child will be temporarily working from home for the health and safety of themselves or others."

In other business, the board approved an amendment to the employee handbook clarifying what types of speech are appropriate on social media. According to Assistant Superintendent David Murphy, controversial beliefs could result in disciplinary action or termination.

"Many people have strong opinions with what's taking place in our society right now, and sometimes posts are made that do not reflect well on our school system," Murphy said. "Although employees possess the personal right to freedom of speech ... employees engaging in divisive language, posts or replies, even on their personal social media accounts, that reflect poorly on the school district may result in disciplinary actions."

"Social media dialogues that minimize or negate an employee's ability to perform the required duties may result in termination."

According to Murphy, the new social media guidelines most immediately address recent complaints from parties located outside the community learning that a Union County faculty member was responsible for certain online comments.

Hill said after the meeting that, thankfully, no one has had to be terminated to this point, but that the handbook addition will help to address the matter of social media use by employees to prevent "negative attention to the school system."

Faculty received some especially positive news during last week's regular school board meeting when Hill revealed that no teacher furloughs had to be included in the 2020-21 calendar, despite substantial budget cuts.

In other fiscal news, it was announced in the July 21 meeting that Union County had received a five-year, \$3.2 million grant to battle illiteracy.

Additionally, the school system was one of three Georgia schools awarded a \$3 million grant to develop a College and Career Academy. The endowment will help students better prepare for college, trade school and the workplace.

Early Voting...from Page 1A

guests are required to wear face masks, practice social distancing and submit to temperature checks before entering the building.

Voters would not usually be required to wear facial coverings to vote; however, since early in-person voting takes place in a courthouse under judicial order, masks are being required.

People who are uncomfortable voting in a mask may head to the polls on Election Day, as currently, facial coverings are not being required to vote at precincts, though this is subject to change depending on the COVID-19 situation. There's also the option of mailing an absentee ballot.

Additionally, poll workers are following COVID-19 best practices by regularly sanitizing equipment, and the Union County Government is supplying masks at the courthouse for people who don't have them, as well as hand sanitizer.

The election features two runoff races that were undecided in the June 9 General Primary, one Republican and one Democratic, to decide the respective party nominees for the office of U.S. Representative in the 117th Congress from the 9th Congressional District.

On the Republican side is the contest between Matt Gurtler and Andrew Clyde, while the Democratic ticket features Devin Pandy and Brooke Siskin. Whoever wins their respective party nomination on Aug. 11 will

square off against the other party nominee on Nov. 3.

Since this is a primary runoff, voters who participated in the June 9 election must vote with the same political party. People who selected nonpartisan ballots during the primary, as well as individuals who did not vote in the primary, must choose a party to vote in the runoff.

Election Day will be Tuesday, Aug. 11, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., and that day, voters should report to one of the 11 pre-assigned Union County voting precincts: Ivy Log, Dooley, Gum Log, Blairsville, Pat Colwell, Trackrock, Coosa, Jones Creek, Owl Town, Choestoe and Suches.

Voters are not required to bring their mailed precinct cards, but they must show a valid photo ID to vote.

Registered voters who will be at least 18 years of age by Election Day are eligible to vote during early voting, though July 13 was the registration deadline for voters looking to participate in the Aug. 11 election.

People may request mailed absentee ballots or inquire about their absentee status by visiting the Secretary of State's Office website at sos.ga.gov, calling the local Registrar's Office at 706-439-6016, or swinging by the office at 65 Courthouse Street.

For the rest of the year, absentee ballots will be automatically mailed to voters who informed the Registrar's Office they were elderly or disabled on a

previous application, though all others need to apply for mail-in absentee ballots on a per-election basis.

People wanting to fill out their absentee ballots/applications and drop them off in person to the Registrar's Office can do so at the courthouse up to 7 p.m. on Aug. 11. There is also a drop box affixed to the wall outside the upper courthouse entrance for convenience.

An absentee ballot/application must be submitted by the voter requesting one, except for a disabled person, who may have a relative by blood or marriage return his or her absentee ballot/application.

Those who receive an absentee ballot by mail but decide to vote in person will need to have their absentee ballot canceled at time of voting.

Voters can access mvp.sos.ga.gov ahead of the election for information on voter registration status, mail-in application and ballot status, poll location, registration information on file with the county office, sample ballots and more.

It should be noted that voters are not allowed to display campaign-related materials at polling places where promoted candidates appear on ballots. For example, for the Nov. 3 election, voters will not be allowed to enter polling places wearing clothing promoting Donald Trump or Joe Biden for president.

Jacob Williams presents Gardening Lecture Friday, August 7th

Let's Get Growing, the annual Summer Education Series at Hamilton Gardens, are on the first and third Friday of each month at 11 a.m. The first lecture in August will be on Friday, August 7, 2020 at the Paris Pavilion and will be on Cool Weather Gardening by Jacob Williams, UGA, Extension, Towns/Union counties. Fall will be here before we know it, so what are the cool weather items that you can plant and enjoy.

To reach the Gardens turn into the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds entry from Hwy.

76, take your first right after the arch and go to the top level of the parking tiers. The Paris Pavilion is an open air location with a good number of picnic tables to allow for spaced seating and you are encouraged to wear a mask.

These are free lectures, but your donations for the Gardens upkeep are greatly appreciated.

So come, bring a notepad and learn from the pros.

For more information, visit hamiltongardens.org or follow us on facebook.




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