

LGC K-12 Education Advisory Board

Meeting Minutes

22 September 2021 via ZOOM

Participants:

- Nancy Muller – LGC
- Jonathan Solomon – LGC
- Bridget McLernon Sykes – CofC/
Guest Speaker
- Evan Ortlieb – The Citadel
- Barbara Stapleton – Charleston
Chamber of Commerce
- Robin Willis – Charleston Chamber of
Commerce
- Sharon Snyder – Berkeley County
School District
- Anne Weston – Ashley Hall
- Spencer Jordan – SC Independent
School Association
- Sharon Snyder – Berkeley County
School District
- Corey Prentiss – Dorchester 4 School
District

Nancy opened the meeting at 4:04 PM with a brief introduction of Bridget McLernon Sykes, who serves as the COVID-lead for the College of Charleston for the past 18 months. Prior, Ms. Sykes was the head of Student Health at The College for the previous five years.

Ms. Sykes introduced herself to the board. She is a board-certified family and psychiatric nurse practitioner. Her work with the College of Charleston began in 2008. In 2016, she took over the directorship of the Department of Student Health.

In March 2020, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the work at CofC intensified due to the quantity of medical questions and decisions that were instrumental to how the College would function throughout the pandemic. As the COVID-lead, Ms. Sykes pivoted into the role as the person responsible for advising senior staff and serving as liaison between student health services, the administration, and talking individually to students. Her role would increase by doing contact tracing herself and being responsible for the training of the team who conducts contact tracing.

As of this year, Ms. Sykes has returned to provide clinically patient care in addition to her ongoing role at the College of Charleston.

Dr. Muller asked the board members and those attending to briefly introduce themselves before continuing with Ms. Skye's presentation about how the College of Charleston organized to respond in the face of the pandemic to keep students, faculty and staff as protected as possible from the virus. She framed her remarks with a set of informative Power Point slides.

The College of Charleston's COVID response is based on the response the College took to a MUMPS outbreak in Fall 2019. Starting in late September of that year, the most likely culprit was due to hurricane evacuation. With two cases within two days of each other, infections quickly increased and DHEC was immediately called to assist with mitigation and reporting guidance.

Early during the Mumps outbreak, Student Health services had to determine whether this was occurring within the unvaccinated or the vaccinated population, but CofC didn't have all the vaccination of records of students. In addition, CofC had paper charting systems which meant that everything was done by hand.

In working with DHEC, a response was made and the first communication at-large was that students not vaccinated (or those who had not submitted record of vaccination) may be asked to leave campus immediately. This communication had a great impact because suddenly long lines began to form outside of the Student Health Services building of students trying to hand in paper vaccine records.

Over time, it was discovered that the greatest number of positive cases were occurring among vaccinated students. It was a lesson to be learned and foreshadowed the education needed to the public about the effectiveness of vaccines. The MMR vaccine is 92% effective against Measles and German Measles (aka Rubella), yet only 82-84% effective against Mumps. Although the cases of Mumps were mild, it was spreading on campus.

DHEC advised that students should socially distance and consider wearing masks, but in Fall 2019, there was almost no support for it. Fast-forward less than six months later, the COVID-19 pandemic would essentially force those requirements.

At the time of the Mumps outbreak, a communication team was formed to combat misinformation and aggressiveness from the media and public. Over the course of the outbreak, 75 cases in total were reported. Yet, it wasn't clear to people that the total reported cases did not equal the number of current cases on campus.

This effort to clarify data and communications to the public and the campus community led to the development of how CofC approached the COVID-19 pandemic.

In early 2020, Student Health Services began getting health advisories from the CDC that there was a pneumonia of unidentifiable etiology occurring in China. In February 2020, Ms. Sykes re-assembled the communications team from the Fall of 2019 to begin forming a plan to bring home students as quickly as possible in study abroad programs in Asia. For example, there was a study abroad in Korea whose students were the first to return and quarantine. After this, COVID and responses progressed quickly and in early March, it looked like Spring Break would be extended, following the University of South Carolina's direction. Ms. Sykes remarked that the College of Charleston closely followed what Clemson and the UofSC were doing and publicly saying regarding mitigation efforts.

The discussions with faculty about pivoting immediately after Spring Break to remote, online instruction was not well received by CofC faculty members, due to lack of technology infrastructure, lack of training and familiarity by many with remote instruction, and the immediate changes that would be imposed requiring many to overhaul lesson plans, assignments, etc.

CofC did send students out on spring break on March 12th, and soon after, nationwide lockdowns came right around the same time. Even though lockdowns had occurred, and virtual instructions were the modality of instructions across the CofC programs, there were roughly 56 students who had to stay on campus due to unsafe home environments, family members high risk, or just didn't have a place to go. With a small number of students still on campus through lockdown, this meant that services had to be available to them, and some staff had to continue coming into work every day.

Fast-forward through the Summer of 2020, a game plan was formed to bring students back in-person in the Fall. Yet, with the cases skyrocketing at colleges and universities that were opening back up in Fall 2020, including at the University of North Carolina which after one week of on-campus classes had to send home all students for remote instruction. The CofC learned from those experiences and decided to delay the start of the Fall semester and begin with two weeks of virtual instruction.

Although the worry was 75% capacity in residence halls, a tremendous amount of time was prioritizing wargaming out the possibility of positive cases happening in certain suites and rooms in which students shared. Shared bedrooms were minimized as much as possible and one entire residence hall was transformed into an isolation residence hall. Classrooms were measured to allow desks to be six feet apart, with seating taken out to ensure safe capacity requirements. Many courses remained in an online mode of instruction.

As of the current term of Fall 2021, face-to-face instruction resumed and residence halls were back at 100% capacity. Classroom seating is set to three-foot distancing, which is based on the K-12 standards. Contact tracing is still happening and is closely monitored, with one person dedicated to every single positive case to in turn contact the registrar's office for the entire course load of that student in order to perform contact tracing and enforce isolation. This data is populated into a spreadsheet to see if there are more than three cases popping up in one classroom section a week. So far, there has only been one class that had three cases, but it was in a large lecture hall with 130 students over the time period of two weeks.

For the first 15 months, the COVID Leadership team at the College of Charleston met every day of the week. The leadership team includes the CofC President, Executive Team, Provost's Office, University Communications, Business Affairs, IT, HR, Residential Life, Facilities, and Student Health.

Eventually, this team would meet 3x per week and then down to once per week during Summer 2021. As of now, the COVID team meets 3x per week and discusses how many cases are occurring each day and what new decisions need to be made.

By the numbers:

- There have been more than 54 testing events on campus with over 35 vaccination clinics.
- 10,000+ tests have been administered.
- 70,000+ masks have been distributed
- 2,000+ vaccines have been administered
- 15,700+ meals have been delivered to students in isolation/quarantine

- 59 virtual town halls have been held by the President with senior management
- 3 MythBusters Forums have been held

In addition to the leadership team, there is a COVID Quarantine & Isolation team that helps manage the logistics of students in quarantine. This team includes: Student Health Services plus Contact tracing team, Housing, Business Affairs, Residential Life, Dining, Facilities, Athletics, Senior Leadership, Public Safety and Guest Housing.

Unlike last year, the current plan is that the student must have a plan if a student is put in quarantine to leave campus due to CofC's 100% residence hall capacity. Many students are going home, renting Airbnb's, etc. This plan is similar to Clemson University and the University of South Carolina. There are areas that students who are international, out of state, or can't return home can go, but the College is encouraging students to leave campus if having to quarantine.

There have been really good partnerships for on-campus testing. MUSC, DHEC, and the University of South Carolina College of Pharmacy have all helped in ensuring testing is provided multiple times per week.

Due to the SC General Assembly prohibiting mandatory vaccinations and masks, The College asked one of three things for students to provide:

1. Provide a COVID test result identifying whether they were positive or negative. If positive, they could not return to campus until the quarantine/isolation period was up.
2. Show documentation of a FULL vaccination status.
3. Provide documentation of a positive COVID test within 90 days prior to move in.

Overall, there has been a 99% compliance rate within the student body. This has led to Student Health Services to communicate with faculty what the Fall 2021 mitigation measures are to ensure transparency and understanding of what was in place.

At present, CofC is 73-74% vaccinated among all students and faculty and 81% among residential students. Approximately half of its staff is vaccinated. The College is requiring universal mask wearing in all classrooms and in any indoor space.

There is voluntary FREE testing weekly for all community members and Health Services has acquired rapid self-testing kits for faculty who wish to do regular monitoring.

Thanking Ms. Sykes for her informative and compelling narrative of events and decisions, Muller opened up discussion of the group with questions for Ms. Sykes.

Anne Weston, from Ashley Hall, discussed the school's response to COVID. Much like the College of Charleston, there were observations of COVID-19 starting in China because of the School's international students, but as it progressed, three out of five students went home to China for Chinese New Year and never came back due to lockdowns. Procedures were put in place due to those who remained in Charleston, but many left and returned to their homes. Two who were overseas finally came back to finish their senior years.

Sharon Snyder, from Berkeley County School District, stated that there hasn't been much contact tracing during the Fall and Spring of 2021; however, a call center has been hired to assist with contact tracing and ensuring that parents are called. Unfortunately, with the staffing shortages occurring within the state, there has been all-hands-on-deck when contacting parents and helping in contact tracing.

Corey Prentiss, from Dorchester School District 4, commented that with her district being small, it is not uncommon for staff to wear multiple hats on a normal day. Some staff are known to work until midnight going through spreadsheets and self-reporting forms to work on contact tracing.

Q&A

Barbara Stapleton, from the Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce asked: When having the universal mask wearing in classrooms, is there messaging related to the push back that could be beneficial for school districts and employers?

- As it is somewhat different with college students than K-12, CofC doesn't have the parents complaining or directing whether or not their student is wearing a mask. There are reports of students refusing to wear masks in classrooms and in Fall 2020, there was a statement faculty liked to use which was "no mask, no class." So, the professor did have the right and freedom to transfer modality to fully online, and the same remains for this year. As part of the student code of conduct, being disruptive in the classroom is something that could discipline a student on conduct charges for impairing the ability of another student to learn within the classroom environment.

In a follow-up question, Ms. Stapleton asked if there was any messaging toward faculty and staff?

- Yes, but one of the efforts by The College was to ensure Frequently Asked Questions were available and information was accessible. [Back to the Bricks](#) is the webpage used for CofC.
- Accommodations can be given through the Office of Equal Opportunity but the accommodations don't exclude them from NOT wearing a mask.

One of the hardest parts of the pandemic was the return-to-work order from the Governor last Spring where faculty and staff with young children felt ignored and unsure of how to do their jobs and parent. CofC pushed back at the State to have a staggered approach in ensuring faculty and staff were able to accomplish their jobs and parent without disruption, but this was not allowed.

The one thought that Ms. Sykes has is that at the beginning of the pandemic, everyone should have realized that public health is a community approach and not individualistic. Every element of what the CDC offered and what the WHO offered should have been more about the collective responsibility in regards to public health. Without this message, American society became fractured and splintered.

Minutes written by Jonathan Solomon, Sept. 27, 2021

Minutes Approved by Nancy Muller, Oct. 1, 2021