

# The News-Journal

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RAEFORD & HOKE COUNTY N.C.

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## Hoke schools post dramatic gains in testing

### End of Grade, End of Course scores up at every school for year just completed

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

Elated school board member Tom Pilkington said, "Amen," when he heard the news from Hoke School Superintendent Allen Strickland last Friday. Strickland released the preliminary results of End-of-Grade and End-of Course tests, and the performance composites were higher at every Hoke school.

"I appreciate what all of you are doing," Pilkington said. "I know you have worked hard because I have been involved with the schools for 13 years."

"I will fight for our kids. I am proud to see this growth. You are working with less and accomplishing more than a lot of other school systems."

"Hallelujah!" a jubilant Strickland replied to Pilkington.

Using slides, Strickland detailed significant areas of progress in math and reading scores for students in grades 3-8.

Three schools, Rockfish, Sandy Grove and Upchurch Elementary, may be recognized as schools of distinction, he said, because students averaged record-breaking, composite proficiency scores above 80 percent.

"We are hopeful once the state reviews the scores that they will qualify for this honor,"

Strickland said.

Although still unofficial, the ABC accountability test scores will be officially validated by the state in September.

"The Hoke County Schools continue to make progress while funding levels remain well below

the state and local averages," Strickland said. "The performance composite for grades 3-8 countywide has increased from 64 percent in 2001-2002 to 75.3 percent for 2002-2003, an 11 point increase."

Strickland pointed to algebra scores as a particular strength.

"The percentage of students proficient in Algebra I at Hoke County High School increased from 63.5 percent in 2001 to 67.1 percent in 2003."

Strickland said Algebra I scores have also greatly improved at the middle school levels.

"Unofficial results show that 100 percent of students taking Algebra I at East Hoke Middle School scored at the proficient level," Strickland said. "89.6 percent scored at proficiency at West Hoke Middle."

"We are very excited about our results, and this year we put a very strong emphasis on reading," Strickland told local educators at the press conference, held at East Hoke Middle School. "We are extremely pleased the improvements have been so well distributed across the county."

"We are grateful to our staff, parents, teachers and school board, all of those who supported us."

Strickland said his staff was looking at the data, determining what they need to do in the future to bring all the schools in line with successful growth.

"I have not seen any scores higher than these for Hoke schools during the past five years of ABC's accountability," Strickland said. "We believe this signals to us it is having an impact because we are not just seeing it at one school, or two schools."

According to Strickland, the grade performance (See *SCHOOL TESTING*, page 7A)



School Board members Tom Pilkington, William Hollingsworth (left to right), and Superintendent Allen Strickland examine a projected chart of scores.

## Emergency Management Director Schwarcber quits

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

Emergency Management Director Al Schwarcber, also Hoke's fire marshal and safety officer, submitted his resignation to County Manager Mike Wood last Thursday, providing him with a two-day notice.

Schwarcber, 58, was hired as the

deputy director of emergency management/fire services for Cumberland County and offered a higher salary. He began his new supervisory job on Monday.

Wood had removed Schwarcber on April 30 from one of his four positions as 911 communications director, cutting his annual salary by \$5,000. The restructuring resulted because of an

unresolved policy dispute between Sheriff Hubert Peterkin, former 911 Communications Coordinator Ron Fairbanks, and Schwarcber concerning an agency policy to not run traffic and criminal checks during the daytime.

"The higher salary offered was one factor in my decision to take the job in Cumberland," Schwarcber said. "Equally as important is the serious

commitment Cumberland County exhibits towards public safety to include budget, resources, and personnel."

"This is not a matter of size or economics, but rather the result of a county (Cumberland) that responsibly prioritizes its resources in regards to the health, safety and welfare of its citizens," he said.

"I have continually expressed my

view that Hoke's government needed to support a more proactive disaster preparedness program."

Schwarcber said after Wood cut his annual salary two months ago, he unofficially told Wood that he was going to seek employment elsewhere. Schwarcber was earning \$38,550 before the cut. If he had remained in Hoke, (See *SCHWARCBER*, page 7A)

### This Week



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## Hoke delegation presses Cumberland board to oppose buffer

VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

A delegation of 22 citizens and officials from Hoke County listened on Monday night as the Cumberland County board of commissioners reached a stalemate over endorsing a proposed buffer around Fort Bragg and Pope Air Force Base.

"We want to recognize our special guests, Hoke County Manager Mike Wood and City of Raeford Manager Mike McNeill," said Cumberland Commission Chairman Talmadge Baggett. "I think we have a full contingency of Hoke commissioners here, along with the Hoke County Attorney, our very own Neil Yarborough."

Commissioner Bill Cameron spoke on behalf of Hoke's board. "We did not endorse this plan," he said. "I ask you to join

the City of Raeford and Hoke County and not vote for this plan."

Cameron, who owns a large hog farm in western Hoke, said he also owns land "smack in the middle" of the other area the N.C. Department of Commerce officials has also deemed important to prevent growth.

"I overheard a lady say the country has come to town when she saw us here tonight," Cameron said cordially. "So come to Raeford when you want to come to the country."

During the public hearing, Baggett said he believed the private right to own land was the only thing separating Americans from "communism."

"I see this action as a substantial infringement on private property," Baggett (See *CUMBERLAND*, page 8A)



Shown from left, are Raeford attorney Bill Moses, Commissioners Bill Cameron and James Leach at the Cumberland County commissioners meeting.

## Board approves probation, parole building

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

Hoke Commissioners held a public hearing Tuesday evening on the proposed \$20.6 million budget that kicks in on July 1. The meeting was recessed until Thursday morning at 8 a.m. to discuss final details or questions any department heads may have prior to the approval of the budget.

In a surprise announcement, Commission Chairman Bobby Wright said the board has been planning to construct a county-owned building to lease to the N.C. Probation and Parole department, a plan that has

apparently been in the works for several months.

A state law agency that monitors criminal offenders, probation, parole personnel are currently housed at the Locklear Building on U.S. 401 north of Raeford. The lease, which costs approximately \$24,000-\$26,000 annually, expires in September. The new facility will be located in the Hillcrest community on U.S. 401 Business on a 6.5 acre lot where the Raeford Junior Chamber of Commerce structure is situated, but no longer in use.

"We will build a completely new

building," Wright said. "The building was donated to us for a nominal fee of around \$700 so we did not even have to pay for the land."

"We are very excited about the desire by some of the board for this new construction. We will be able to generate some revenue from this rental in the future to offset the expense of building the new headquarters."

Wright said the board agreed to explore the concept of erecting a county building to accommodate the state agency at their annual winter retreat.

(See *PROBATION*, page 8A)

## Caretakers put to death blind, injured eagle found in Rockfish

An injured bald eagle found in east Hoke in late May was put to death — as required by federal law, said Betty O'Leary, a rehabilitator with the Charlotte Raptor Center.

The blind, emaciated raptor had wounds that may have been caused when he flew into a live power line, O'Leary said.

The young bird had tissue damage to the right wing, O'Leary said. After almost a

week at the center, the injured skin turned gray and was moist and sloughing, indicating possible electrical shock, she added.

However, it was the blindness that resulted in his being given an injection that led to an immediate and painless death. The bird did not respond to medication, O'Leary said. "Basically, the bird's vision had not changed at all; he

was still not able to see and was not able to feed on his own."

The eagle would have had to be force-fed every day," O'Leary said. "Noises would have been frightening to him."

O'Leary also said federal law forbids a legally blind bird from being kept for education purposes. "It would have been a poor quality of life" for the bird, she (See *EAGLE*, page 8A)