

Schools Crack Down On Attendance

BY SUSAN USHER

Under a toughened state school compulsory attendance law, students are allowed fewer unexcused absences before a school must notify their parents, Brunswick County Board of Education members learned Monday night.

At their Nov. 4 meeting they will review proposed changes in procedures that will be required to enforce the law locally.

"The change is a crackdown on attendance," said Superintendent Gene Yarbrough. "It's a recognition that we can't teach students if they're not in school."

That's also a concern of the board in looking at the reasons students may be excused. "What's an unexcused absence?" asked Chairman James Forstner, who is considering short-term travel with his own family during the school term.

"An absence that has not been excused by the school," replied Yarbrough.

Under the state and county's current attendance rules, there are approximately eight reasons students may receive an excused absence. These include sickness, farm or other required work approved at least 10 days in advance; and in certain circumstances, to participate in activities "of educational value."

Asked member James Clemmons, "How's that kid going to get math when he's in Atlanta?"

They were concerned that interpretations of allowable absences consider the setting of unfavorable precedent, impact of student absences on their performance on tests, loss of state funds based on the basis of average daily attendance, and students' daily grades and learning.

"Students are awarded points for attendance and participation in class," explained Yarbrough. "I don't think this necessarily motivates students to be there, but it does give credit to the idea that it's difficult to learn material if a student's not there."

Under the new law, schools must notify parents of students between seven and 16 years old if their child misses school three times without an approved excuse. After not more than six unexcused absences, the school must notify the parent that he may be in violation of the state's compulsory school attendance law and may face possible prosecution. The law requires students to stay in school at least until they reach age 16.

After the child has accumulated 10 unexcused absences within the school year, the principal must take

further action.

He must review any report prepared by the school attendance counselor and, if possible, confer with the student and his parent. If the principal finds the parent was notified of the absences and did not make a "good faith effort" to comply with the law, he must notify the district attorney.

If he determines the parent has made a good faith effort, he may file a complaint with the juvenile intake counselor that the child is habitually absent from school without a valid excuse.

Evidence that the parent was notified and that the child has accumulated 10 absences which cannot be justified under the school board's attendance policies "shall establish a prima facie case" that the parent is responsible for the absences.

Meanwhile, once the parents have been notified of any excessive absences, the school attendance counselor is to work with the child and his family to analyze the causes of the absences and to determine steps to eliminate the problem. These might include adjustment of the school program or obtaining supplemental services. The counselor may request a law enforcement officer accompany him if he believes that a home visit is necessary.

Field House

A Southport engineer and former mayor, Eugene Tomlinson, told board members that boosters of the South Brunswick High School athletic program are renewing their efforts to obtain a field house and are seeking the board's assistance.

With a favorable vote of the board, he said, the group is ready to renew its fund-raising efforts.

An earlier proposal for a \$28,000 to \$30,000 field house was rejected approximately two years ago by a former board, although the group had raised one-third the necessary funds, lined up donations of services and signatures for bank notes, he said. A second plan was rejected because it didn't have a brick front; the group had hoped to improve it later as funds became available.

That board instead expressed interest in a \$167,000 field house as at New Bern.

This, said Tomlinson, "is certainly out of taste and not in keeping with our athletic facilities," or with the group's budget.

While Superintendent Gene Yarbrough said he agreed with Tomlinson's contention that a county with a \$1 1/2 million tax base should have the best of school systems and academic and sports facilities, he had no promises.

"I agree with you it's a disgrace, but I can't hold out a lot of hope for funding from the board," he added, because of a proposed classroom construction program.

After-School Fees

Chairman James Forstner told Bob Pruett of Calabash that the fees charged by the school system for after-hours use of school facilities covers operating costs only and that any reduction would take funds away from academic programs.

Pruett was there to repeat a request made last winter for use on Friday nights of a Union Primary School building by the square dance club

he's president of, but only on condition the fee be set at a "reasonable" rate. He said the club was willing to clean up after itself. The club currently dances at the Shallotte American Legion hut, but needs more space.

The only alternative, Forstner advised, would be for the county to provide funds earmarked for community use of the schools as in New Hanover County, where fees are generally not charged as in neighboring counties. Pruett was to meet with Assistant Superintendent P.R. Hankins to see if any arrangement could be reached.

Other Business

In other business, the board:

- Agreed to invite county commissioners to meet with them on Oct. 21 to hear state recommendations for a county school construction program.
- Increased the county travel allowance to conform with the state's travel allowance from \$27 to \$32 per day, in-state; and from \$34 to \$39 out-of-state.
- Agreed with David Bearn's proposal for the Southport Youth Council to assume the lease, in cooperation with local scouts, of an old building owned by the school system in downtown Southport, and to fix it up. Chairman James Forstner described it as a "tumbled-down building that needs whatever help it can get."
- Heard again from Allen Waters, representing the Cedar Grove Branch of the NAACP, and Carolyn Burns. Since the principal of Union Primary School was prepared to hire her, Waters said he didn't think the teacher's competency was an issue in an earlier board decision not to hire her, so he argued, the reason must be her race: "We argue it must be," he said, suggesting a work session with

Burns to resolve any questions of her competency. Former school board member Franklin Randolph asserted that the previous board, of which he was a member, pulled Burns' contract in order to hire another board member's choice of teachers.

• Approved the transfer of student Kimberly Jernigan from Shallotte Middle To Waccamaw Elementary and Tracie Gett from Waccamaw Elementary to Shallotte Middle.

• Approved student trips as follows: West Brunswick Spanish student to the Caribbean Islands and Mexico, March 21-30; Shallotte Middle School group to EPCOT, March 13-16; South Brunswick Middle advanced students of Thomas Clemmons to the Charlotte area to visit points of historical interest, Oct. 25-27; and gifted and talented students of Janet Gore, Shallotte Middle School, to Washington, D.C., for a National Gallery of Art exhibit on English country manors.

• Announced the annual conference of the North Carolina School Boards Association would be held in High Point Nov. 14-16, with members to sign up to go. Attorney E.J. Prevatte will also attend.

• Appointed Donald Warren of Ocean Isle Beach to replace Malcolm Grissett on the Union Primary School Community Schools Advisory Committee; a replacement must also be named for Carolyn Roberts, formerly of Holden Beach. Also, the board appointed Glenda Caylor of Southport to the school bus advisory committee.

• Appointed member James Clemmons, a retired school principal, to serve on the Brunswick County Teacher of the Year Selection Committee.

Member Jane Causey was absent.

Teacher Shortage Felt Locally

Recruiting teachers—especially those in certain fields or minorities—is getting tougher every year for the Brunswick County school system just as it is nationwide, Assistant Superintendent Stephanna Tewey told school board members Monday night.

"We are all experiencing difficulties in certain areas," such as in math and science where applicants get more attractive offers from private industry, added Tewey, assistant superintendent in charge of personnel. The county has not yet found a qualified applicant for a math position at West Brunswick High School.

Another area where teachers are needed most is at the intermediate level. Teachers with grammar school certificates must get recertified as middle school teachers, she said, and there also doesn't appear to be as much interest in teaching that age group.

As of yet, the system has not had to hire non-certified teachers, she said. Also, all faculty teaching out of their subject or area of certification are taking the courses required for recertification. They're aren't many of them," she added. "It's not anywhere what it used to be."

To deal with a shortage expected to worsen quickly, she devised a personnel recruiting plan presented Monday.

At the same meeting, a former school board member criticized the board's hiring practices, suggesting it should hire more blacks, particularly in administrative and guidance roles.

"I feel you will have a better working system if everybody is given an opportunity to work together with different races and to get the job done," said Franklin Randolph of Bolivia.

Chairman James Forstner said the problem wasn't so much the board wasn't hiring enough blacks, but that there weren't enough qualified black applicants for available jobs.

For instance, he said, out of 50 applicants for one job, only two met the minimum requirements.

Tewey's plan to improve the pool of applicants calls for identifying areas of need by the type of job rather than by the school where the vacancy occurs; mailing information on the system to colleges and universities; forming recruiting teams to attend career awareness events and conferences; designing a portable display for similar uses and an information packet for prospective teachers; offering career counseling for students and organizing Future Teacher of America Clubs at the high schools; recruiting minority teachers to meet affirmative action requirements and sharing applicants/openings information in a "multiple listing" type of arrangement now in place with several

school systems, including Pender, Columbus, New Hanover and informally, Robeson and Jones counties and South Carolina.

Tewey said several of the teachers hired Monday were found through the listing arrangement and that she had been contacted for any available applicants in certain areas.

Tewey cited numerous reasons for the problem:

- A decline of 50 percent since 1972 in the number of college education majors;
- An expanding pre-collegiate age group, and a new "baby boom;"
- An aging of the American teaching force, with 30 percent to 40 percent of all teachers eligible to retire within the next five years;
- Projections that there will be 34 percent fewer teachers nationwide by 1992.

Minority teachers are part of the general shortage, she said.

Randolph questioned the apparent hiring of people of "one race" for five curriculum-related positions in the county and in filling guidance positions and principalships in the schools.

In past, he said, the board made a practice of balancing the principals at a school racially, hiring a black assistant for instance if the principal were white. And in guidance, he added, "you've gone just about one race."

Most students, and particularly minorities, he said, prefer speaking of personal matters to someone of the same race. "It provides better insight into the minds of students as well as on campus as a whole," he added.

Custodians

Four of 11 county schools have less than the average allotment of custodians, according to a study completed by the schools' finance office.

In fact it would take the equivalent of another full-time custodian each to bring two schools, Shallotte Middle and Union Primary, up to par.

Based on an average salary of \$875 per month, it would cost the system \$24,588 in salaries alone to bring Lincoln and Union Primary and Leland and Shallotte Middle schools up to the average of all county schools, indicated Finance Officer Sam Aycock. Fringe benefits would add about another 25 percent to the cost.

Some schools exceed the average, and the board did not dismiss the possibility of balancing out custodial forces in part by natural attrition and by transfers.

Custodians are allocated to schools on the basis of each school's average daily membership as reported on the 10th day of school. If the actual square footage of the school is weighted as a factor, the four come up short.

It would take the equivalent of four months of additional custodial labor

at Lincoln; 10.3 months at Shallotte Middle; 10.2 months at Union; and 3.5 months at Leland Middle.

Fire Extinguishers

Two companies—one in the county and the other relocating here—are vying for a contract to maintain the 244 fire extinguishers in the schools.

Brunswick Fire and Safety of Leland, owned by Dale and George Willetts, proposes to charge \$5 or \$4 each to inspect 2 1/2-lb. models, depending on the type. Willetts also proposes to charge from \$6.50 to \$20 each for larger models; and \$40 to service the cafeteria. The charges apply to all extinguishers, whether they require service upon inspection or not. An additional cost plus 25 percent would be charged for any parts required for repairs.

Every extinguisher "would be gone into," he said. "I wouldn't trust tags or gauges."

The other firm, Safety Equipment of Wilmington, would charge a flat \$2.25 per extinguisher for any 2 1/2-lb. model, then \$4.45 each for any larger size and \$35 to service a cafeteria, said spokesman Harry Lovic.

The 2 1/2-lb. extinguishers are used on service vehicles, with 5- to 20-lbers in the schools, said Bill Turner, special assistant to the superintendent.

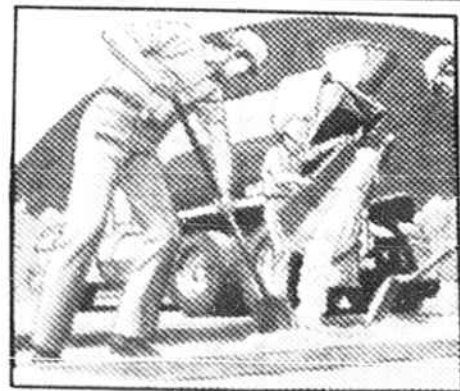
Lovic said Safety Equipment would not charge extra for parts needed for repairs.

Safety Equipment has five of its six Wilmington area locations in 14 buildings on a five-acre tract in Belville, he said, leaving only a retail outlet in Wilmington. The business represents a \$750,000 addition to the tax base with an annual payroll of more than \$250,000, he added.

Both Willetts and Lovic said they would find a majority of extinguishers at most schools in need of service or recharging. Lovic, for instance, said a spot check at Shallotte Middle School showed 12 of 12 empty.

Willetts said his check showed that extinguishers at all three high schools were empty, as well as at all but two county schools.

The extinguishers have not been serviced yet this year, the school board took no action on the maintenance contract Monday.



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Bids Sought On Surplus Items

Looking for a ton of scrap iron, a used pick-up truck, a manual typewriter or an old-fashioned book-keeping machine?

If so, you may want to bid when the Brunswick County Board of Education sells its surplus property. Monday night, school board members voted to allow sale of the property by advertising for sealed bids, retaining the right to reject all offers. At the suggestion of board member James Clemmons, all items will be sold separately except the scrap iron.

"Lumping it together's bad because you don't give the little man a chance," said Clemmons.

The board had tried to sell some of the items through the state surplus property division, without success, said Bill Turner, special assistant to the superintendent.

Turner said the items, which include various vehicles and pieces of business office equipment, would be made available for inspection once the bidding period begins.

Changes Affect Duck Hunting

Waterfowl hunters should be aware of two regulation changes on N.C. Wildlife Commission waterfowl impoundments before duck hunting seasons open in October.

One change prohibits hunters from being within a posted waterfowl impoundment before 4 a.m. and also prohibits hunting in these areas after 1 p.m.

The purpose of the change is to reduce disturbance of waterfowl, which should result in better hunting.

said Grady Barnes, section manager of research and regulations for the Commission's Division of Wildlife Management.

"Prohibiting early entry will prevent the birds from flushing before legal shooting starts, and clearing the impoundment after 1 p.m. will allow ducks to return to feed and rest undisturbed."

The second change prohibits the use of internal-combustion engine powered vessels or vehicles on managed waterfowl impoundments.

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