

# Schools' Waiver Requests Prompting Scrutiny Of County Attendance Policy

BY SUSAN USHER

It's mid-July and 15 students are studying in a classroom at Waccamaw Elementary School in Ash, making up excessive absences from last school term so they will be promoted with their classmates this fall.

From sixth through eighth grade, they're using self-paced, grade-level materials and working under one teacher. They're making up anywhere from one to nine absences over the 10 allowed by the Brunswick County Schools standard attendance policy.

Waccamaw School's dilemma resembles that of schools countywide: how to maintain a high attendance rate while still providing some flexibility in deciding when it is OK for students to miss school, and whether they should make up the missed time in class and/or work missed.

Monday night the Brunswick County Board of Education approved belated requests for attendance policy waivers from Waccamaw Elementary and South Brunswick Middle schools similar to those approved earlier for most other high and middle schools in the county.

Jan Calhoun, assistant superintendent for instruction, recommended approval of the waiver requests but also asked the board to take another look at its attendance policy and talk with principals about it.

"I said months ago that any policy where more than 50 percent of our schools are requesting, we have a problem," he said. "This 10-day pol-

*"We are going to try to take a look at why they were out, if there was an emergency of some kind and whether the absence should be excused or whether they should be allowed to make it up in some fashion."*

—William Shoemaker, Waccamaw Principal

icy is becoming unmanageable for the schools."

In most schools students are allowed to make up excessive absences and missed work throughout the year, doing lessons assigned by their classroom teachers after school, on Saturdays and most recently, in summer school sessions held after the end of the term.

"It keeps our attendance rate up, but I'm not sure it's helping our instructional program," said Calhoun.

School board member Bill Fairley told Calhoun he knew "from first-hand experience" that Southport Elementary isn't enforcing the policy.

Chairperson Donna Baxter supported approval of the waivers but was concerned that schools were drifting away from a policy intended to provide greater uniformity and eliminate parents' concerns that a student at one school wasn't being treated the same as a student at another school in identical situations.

"Three years ago we tried to get the entire county on the same system," she said. "Why do we keep going back and forth? We've got to be able to work it out."

If Waccamaw School had changed its policy last year, Principal William Shoemaker estimates the number of students with excessive absences still to made up after the end of the term would have been closer to five.

Waccamaw's new policy is consistent with the attendance policy West Brunswick High School moved to at mid-year last school year under a waiver approved by the school board. Since then most high schools and middle schools in the county have adopted similar policies.

West Brunswick's policy allows students to miss 16 days or classes during the year, and no more than four days or classes per grading term. Absences are to made up as

the school year progresses.

Shoemaker said moving to a four absences per grading period system at Waccamaw "will bring our sixth, seventh and eighth grades into alignment with the high school and make the transition to high school easier for our students."

"Also, it's not fair to hold our kids to a different standard."

He predicts the change will give the school more flexibility in meeting students' needs while helping maintain or improve a school attendance rate that's consistently 95 percent or better.

"In the past absences were absences," said Shoemaker. "The only difference is that with excused absences students can make up the work they've missed."

Under the new policy an attendance committee will determine what absences should be excused and hear appeals of attendance-related matters.

"We are going to try to take a look at why they were out, if there was an emergency of some kind and whether the absence should be excused or whether they should be allowed to make it up in some fashion."

At South Brunswick Middle, students will also be allowed four absences per grading period and given an opportunity to make them up. Those who have excessive absences that have not been made up will see their grade drop by one full letter grade, regardless of the number of excessive absences.



STAFF PHOTO BY ERIC CARLSON

## What Rain?

Tyler Bordeaux, age 2, enjoys a dry vantage point under an awning of beach towels as the N.C. 4th of July Festival parade passes by last week. His parents David and Gayle Bordeaux made the trip from their home in Wilmington to enjoy the holiday festivities.

## Sunny Point Seeks Input On Dredging

A draft environmental impact statement has been released assessing the environmental effects of the harbor improvement project at Military Ocean Terminal Sunny Point.

Proposed improvements consist of dredging to deepen the south and center basins and their entrance channels from 34 feet to 38 feet mean low water, plus two feet of overdepth. The dredging will also widen these entrance channels from 300 to 400 feet. In addition, a portion of the center basin will be widened from current widths of 800 to 1,000 feet to a new overall width of 1,500 feet.

Dredged material "probably" will be disposed of at the Wilmington Ocean Dredged Material Disposal Site, three nautical miles offshore in the Atlantic, according to a MOTSU news release.

Any modification of that proposal will be addressed in the final environmental impact statement, the release states.

The improvements are designed to accommodate larger, more modern vessels at the terminal. The changes will allow for safe passage and maneuvering of deep-draft vessels and permit full loading of boats to their design capacity and draft.

Comments and suggestions must be received by Aug. 22. To comment, call Phil Payonk at (910)251-4589.

The Sunny Point terminal is on the west bank of the Cape Fear River 25 miles south of Wilmington and five miles north of Southport.

It is a military port facility designed and constructed for the transshipment of explosives, munitions and other materials.

## OFFICIALS HAVEN'T GIVEN UP ON IDEA

# Alternative School Funds Remain Uncertain

BY SUSAN USHER

Assistant Superintendent of Schools Oscar Blanks hasn't given up on getting at least a part of the crime prevention money sought from the State Board of Education to operate a planned alternative learning center for students who don't fit in a traditional school setting.

But Monday night he called in the big guns to help.

With requests far exceeding the funds available, the state education board, meeting Friday in Raleigh, couldn't decide whether to partially fund a majority of the projects or more fully fund a smaller percentage.

Blanks asked for and got a commitment from the school board to write the state board seeking full funding of its proposal, but assuring state officials that even partial funding would be used effectively.

"It is going to be for the board and others to intervene," he said. "It's not that we have given up on it, but that at a certain level the board has to step in."

"What they want is assurance from the board

of education that this is not just a half-hearted effort."

If the schools receive the funds, the most they can expect is about \$200,000 of the original \$493,000 request, he said, but that won't eliminate plans for the alternative school.

As part of a \$197,000 grant of other state crime prevention funds, several positions are available for the new school. The county is being asked for \$150,000 to set up the facility, and pay for utilities, custodial care and maintenance and other support needs not covered by grant funds.

The school board is discussing with Carolina Power and Light officials the possible transfer of modular office units from CP&L's Brunswick Nuclear Plant to the school system for an alternative school campus.

Meanwhile, Brunswick Community College trustees were to vote Wednesday night, July 13, on a request to temporarily house the alternative school in classrooms at its Southport campus on North Lord Street.

Blanks had proposed serving 150 students with 12 teachers and support staff at a central lo-

cation, also drawing on community services to help meet their needs. The school would be operated under the Communities In Schools program.

With partial funding of the grant plus the other support, Blanks said the school could still serve 120 to 125 students with "redirection" of some drop-out prevention money.

"The entire premise of this school is drop-out prevention," he said. "We're trying to reclaim drop-outs and prevent dropping out. I think we're going to have a long waiting list."

In other business the board met behind closed doors for 1½ hours on attorney-client and personnel matters, then approved a personnel list (see related story) and replaced the plumbing contractor on the West Brunswick High School construction project scheduled to begin later this month.

Ogden Utilities, whose low bid of \$27,762 had been accepted earlier, was unable to obtain a required performance bond in timely fashion. The board voted to refund the company's bid deposit and award the contract to Cape Fear Plumbing at a contract price of \$31,650.

## Varnamtown Officials Want Kids To Steer Clear Of Boat Ramp

BY DOUG RUTTER

It's been going on for generations in Varnamtown.

Every summer, when the temperature soars into the upper 80s and 90s, kids flock to the waterfront for a refreshing swim in the Lockwood Folly River.

Town officials say they don't want to break the tradition, but agree they may have to do something about youngsters who block access to the public boat ramp at the end of Fisherman Road.

At Monday night's town meeting, aldermen said there have been problems this summer with kids who are reluctant to get out of the way of boaters trying to use the ramp.

"Nobody wants to stop them from enjoying it, but when a boat comes they should get out of the way," Mayor Judy Galloway said.

Varnamtown resident and fisherman Herbert "Midget" Varnum said Monday he recently had a problem with a boy who parked his bicycle on the ramp and refused to move it.

Varnum said he slowly backed his

pickup truck and boat trailer down the ramp until the child moved the bike. "I wasn't going to hit the young'un's bike but he didn't know that," he said.

Alderman Will Mumford suggested the town erect a sign saying, "Public Boat Ramp No Swimming," but board members decided to do nothing for the time being.

"It might work itself out, or maybe we could speak with some parents if it really becomes a problem," board member Ada McDonald said.

Town officials said they don't think the town could be held liable if an accident occurred at the ramp. The town does not own the property, and is only responsible for maintenance of the ramp.

"We don't own that land. It's public trust land and we don't have anything to do with it," Mumford said.

### Inspection Fees Changed

In other business Monday, aldermen decided to change the way they will pay mobile home inspector Maurice Galloway.

Galloway will receive \$10 for

each mobile home inspection inside the town limits and within five miles of town. For each inspection that requires Galloway to travel more than five miles outside the town, he will be paid \$25.

Galloway has not been receiving any pay until this month. The town board put \$250 in this year's budget for inspections, and the original plan was to pay \$10 for in-town inspections and \$25 for out-of-town inspections.

"It's too wide open to say \$25 outside the town," McDonald said

Monday. "He may inspect a home across Stanbury Run and it's \$25."

### Land Use Plan

McDonald also reported Monday that the preliminary draft of the town's first land use plan is nearly completed.

The planning board, which has been working on the document, will meet Aug. 1 at 7 p.m. with consulting planner Howard Capps of Wilm.

"We basically turned our corrections in and we're waiting for him to produce the final copy," McDonald said.



## LITTLE PROFESSOR BOOK CENTER

### LOCAL AUTHORS TO SIGN

• FRIDAY, JULY 15, 2:00-4:00 PM

Meet Franda Pedlow, author of *Sand and Sea Fever*. A North Carolina native now living in Richmond, Virginia, Ms. Pedlow has written a captivating account of her favorite place and second home, Holden Beach, focusing on changes, history and folklore that has evolved over the course of her years of visiting the area.

• WEDNESDAY, JULY 20, 10:30 AM-1:30 PM

"Grandmother Poppy", reading her stories and signing her books! Wilmington resident, Mary Allred, whose Grandmother Poppy books have entertained and educated children for two decades, has created her stories based upon true accounts with her own grandchildren, providing entertaining reading and sound teaching curriculum for children in the grade-school-age years.



Don't be a sad face! Mark Your calendar now so you won't miss these authors!

River Run Shopping Center, Southport  
910-457-9653

## Area Queens

Tiny Miss North Carolina 4th of July



**Devan Ashley Johnson**  
daughter of Van and Pam Johnson of Supply. Grandparents Hazel Johnson and the late Marvin Johnson of Supply and Joe and Charlotte Walton of Southport.

Little Miss North Carolina 4th of July



**Shaina Rae Jordan**  
daughter of Gary and Joyce Jordan of Ash. Grandparents, Leona Fearnside and the late Bennett Fearnside of Ash and Ray and Natalie Nicholas of Supply.



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