

STAFF SURVEYS GO OUT NOVEMBER 15

Board Chairmen Anticipate Benefits Of School Performance Audit

BY SUSAN USHER

A performance audit of the Brunswick County Schools administration that the state auditor's office will soon begin is a good thing. On that school board chairman Donna Baxter and county commissioners' chairman Don Warren agree.

"I feel real positive about it," said Warren. "They're sending out the questionnaires and conducting interviews. I think it will be very useful."

The audit, which begins next month and should be released in mid-March, is intended to identify the system's strengths and weaknesses. In its report, the office will offer recommendations for improving the efficiency and effectiveness at the central office and individual school levels, and for more effective communications by the central office, school and community with the aim of improving performance and operation.

"I'm hoping the public will find it very informative," said Baxter. "I think they will see that the school system is much more accountable to them than it has been in the past, and that we've made a lot of

changes for the better.

"Those changes have come about through the efforts of the school board, (Superintendent) Ralph Johnston and people within the system who want to stop seeing the school system used as a dumping ground for guilt."

Since 1975 the state auditor's office has conducted 11 school system audits which it says have resulted in projected savings of approximately \$7 million. Typical recommendations relate to consolidation of sites, reductions in staff, restructuring of staff and simplification in the way services are delivered.

During Johnston's tenure as superintendent the board has undertaken revamping all school system policies, some of which are being disseminated to staff now, partial reorganization of the central office, long-range planning for the system, better communication among the administrative staff, and more site-based management and accountability.

Most of all, said Baxter, who will end her sixth year on the board on December 5, "I hope the results of

What Do The Auditors Find?

The State Office of the Auditor reports that in the 11 school system audits it has completed, these are the most frequent findings. The percentage refers to the percent of audits that addressed the issue identified:

- 83% — fragmented authority
- 75% — poor communication
- lack of and/or poor long-range planning
- lack of formal procedures and/or updating system
- 50+% — overlapping and duplication of duties and/or understaffing
- poor or weak internal financial controls or procedures
- non-contiguous location of central office staff
- 50% — unmanageable spans of control
- lack of a comprehensive position management system and poor use of staff resources
- lack of or ineffective time management system
- lack of coordination and planning for use of technology.

Problems identified less frequently included ineffective performance evaluation system, poor or inadequate staff development planning, board of education interference in day-to-day operations, questionable purchasing and warehouse functions, excessive or questionable overtime and excessive number and use of system vehicles.

this study will take the focus off the past and put it on the future so we can move forward."

She said she believes the auditors will confirm the findings of a state Department of Public Instruction

team that in a 1991 management study recommended adding, not eliminating central office positions.

Baxter believes the school system's weakest point will probably be in the area of communication within

the schools and with the system's publics.

Top school and county officials met last Thursday with a team from the state auditor's office to discuss the scope and timetable of the audit. The two boards are splitting the \$5,000 local share of the cost, while state taxpayers will foot the balance of the estimated \$46,720 tab.

On Nov. 15, central office- and school-based personnel will be sent questionnaires that include standard questions and any additional questions submitted by the county or the school system.

Central office staff members will be asked, for example, about internal communications, how well their skills are used, motivation, central office space, facilities and support materials, bottlenecks and job duplications, organizational structure, policies and resource management. School-based employees are asked similar questions, as well as "If you were Superintendent, what changes would you make in the system's operations to make the system more efficient and effective?"

The questionnaires, which will be

mailed from Raleigh to school system employees at their home addresses, also invite additional comment and provide opportunities for private interviews during the team's on-site visit early next year. Baxter said some current and newly-seated school board members and commissioners will be interviewed as well.

After the questionnaire results are tabulated and analyzed the team will examine existing policies and procedures, job descriptions, functions and staffing, span of control, payroll and long-range planning. A three-member team headed by Supervisor Janet Hayes will conduct on-site confidential interviews in the county and address identified issues in greater depth. A fourth team member will be based in Raleigh.

The superintendent will be allowed to comment on the findings and recommendations, and those comments will be incorporated into the final report before its formal presentation to the school board.

Both the school board and commissioners have said they intend to use the audit results in discussions on the 1995-96 school system budget.

Former Students Recognize Their Teachers

A group of Brunswick County teachers is being honored by their toughest critics—former students, in the third edition of "Who's Who Among America's Teachers" 1994.

The 66,500 teachers were selected by their former students currently

listed in "Who's Who Among American High School Students" or "The National Dean's List." Students were asked to nominate teachers who "made a difference in their lives" by helping them shape values, inspiring interest in a partic-

ular subject and/or challenging them to strive for excellence.

Local educators chosen were:
 ■ Gene Allen Bennett Jr., Melba Edwards Johnson, Rita Lewis Fisher, West Brunswick High School;

■ Mary Bennett Dawson, Snowree Gause Hewett, Union Elementary School;

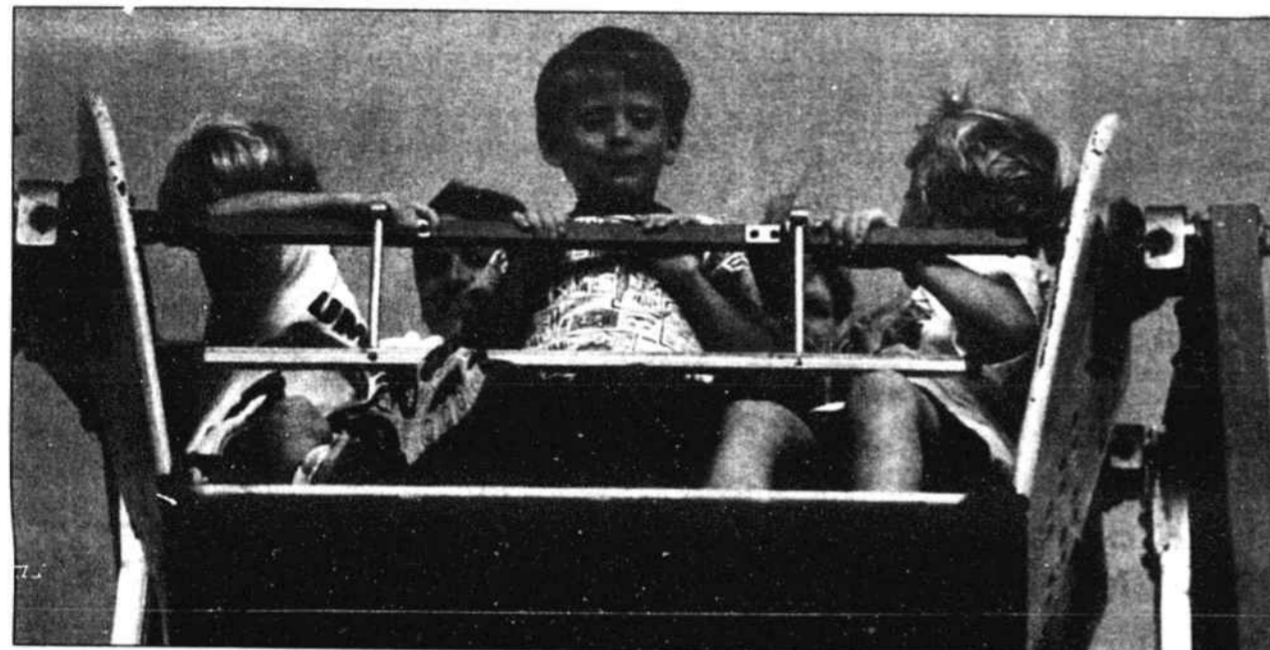
■ Emily Kirby Sellers, Shallotte Middle School.

■ Elizabeth Buck Bradley, Amy Allen Maultsby, Jerry W. Smith, South Brunswick High School;

■ Mary Catherine Cabanis Brooks, South Brunswick Middle School;

■ Beverly Bernard Hewett, Southport Elementary School.

■ John Thad Galloway and Norman Harrison Melton, North Brunswick High School.



STAFF PHOTO BY ERIC CARLSON

Riding High

Youngsters and parents enjoy a ferris wheel ride at the N.C. Oyster Festival Oct. 15. The party spirit lives on this week as the N.C. Festival By The Sea opens Friday night at Holden Beach.

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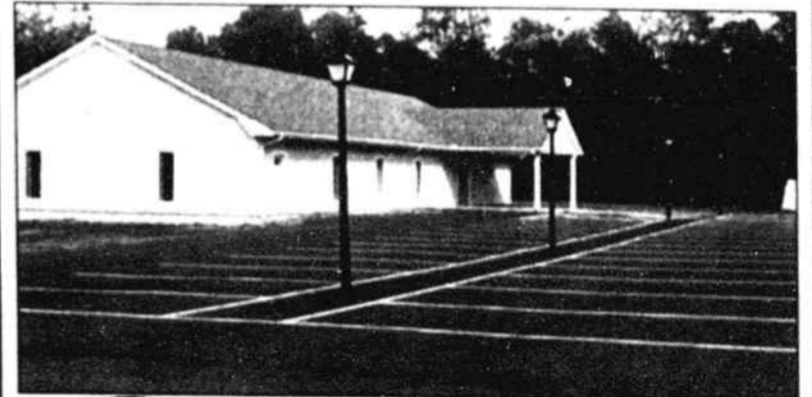
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