

Area school districts brace for letter grades

BY CORINNE SAUNDERS
The Daily Advance

The Edenton-Chowan Schools and other area school districts are preparing for the state's release of first-ever letter grades for each school in North Carolina — letter grades school officials feel were unfairly compiled and that don't accurately reflect students' true level of learning.

Individual school grades for the 2013-14 school year are set to be released Feb. 5, along with the annual school report cards that detail school achievement in a variety of areas.

The letter grades, mandated by state lawmakers to begin this year, are based 80 percent on student achievement — the number of students proficient on end-of-grade and end-of-course testing — and 20 percent on student growth, which measures whether students learned a year's worth of material in a year's time.

Educators have expressed concerns about that

formula, calling it inverted. A resolution opposing the letter grades adopted in December by four area boards of education — Edenton-Chowan, Currituck County, Perquimans County and Elizabeth City-Pasquotank — states the new grading system "under-emphasizes gains in yearly growth" and "disproportionately" emphasizes performance on standardized tests.

Student academic growth is "the best indicator of the overall quality of instruction provided" in the schools, states the resolution, which was drafted by the North Carolina School Boards Association.

The resolution also claims that students from wealthier neighborhoods score better on standardized tests than students from poorer neighborhoods, so it's unfair to award schools comparative letter grades that only underscore those disparities.

While most area school officials believe their schools' letter grades will be low, only one school dis-

trict has hazarded to make a guess publicly what its scores may be.

Paul O'Briant, chief information officer for the Currituck County Schools, said at a school board meeting earlier this month that, based on preliminary calculations, "most of our schools" will get Cs. He's also expecting "a couple Ds (and) maybe a B," he said.

O'Briant said that's concerning because Currituck and other school districts already have the data used to calculate the school letter grades, and are working to improve student achievement in areas where it's needed. Compiling and releasing the grades will do nothing to benefit that work, he said.

Sandy Kinzel, assistant superintendent of Currituck County Schools, said in a followup email that district officials "believe one grade does not accurately tell a complete story of a school or district's performance."

"Teaching and encouraging students to be creative,

compassionate and productive citizens isn't measured in standardized tests on which this school performance grade is based," Kinzel said. "We're proud of the education our schools provide our students, which includes the arts, community-focused projects and leadership opportunities."

Other area school officials have expressed similar concerns.

"We want our students to be proficient, but the only way to get there is to grow," said Teresa Beardsley, coordinator of community relations for Perquimans County Schools. "We know as educators that the individual growth of each student is the most important thing."

If a student "has worked hard all year and done well all year" but then did poorly on one test, his grade isn't based on that one test, Beardsley said. By the same token, she said, a school that has shown academic improvement over the year shouldn't be issued a letter

grade based on one performance measurement.

It's demoralizing, Beardsley said, if teachers work all year, helping students grow individually, but now "they're being put in a category of a C or a D or whatever."

Beardsley noted that the school letter grading system doesn't account for the fact that students enter school with different backgrounds and levels of preparation. The grades also don't consider mentoring programs, college and career readiness programs, community events and other school-based initiatives, she said.

A school letter grade also "doesn't capture the great things happening in the arts, (physical education), career and technical education" or other areas not measured by a state exam, said Camden County Schools Superintendent Melvin Hawkins.

The grades also "just gloss over" the fact that all Camden schools met or exceeded growth on last year's state accountability testing,

he said. Growing students academically is the purpose of schools, Hawkins noted, and being successful in that "is reason to celebrate."

Anticipating a lot of public interest in the grades once they are released, school officials are taking a number of steps they hope will explain what the grades mean — and don't mean.

Perquimans' Central Office staffers have spoken to local civic clubs, the Perquimans Ministers Council — a local group of ministers who work closely with the schools — and the Perquimans County NAACP. They've also encouraged local ministers to speak to their church congregations, Beardsley said.

Officials in the Elizabeth City-Pasquotank Public Schools plan to hold a community meeting this week to explain the school letter grades. The meeting is scheduled for Thursday and will be held in the Sheep-Harney Elementary School auditorium at 6:30 p.m.

Police warn of fake bills

From staff reports

The Edenton Police Department is currently investigating several recent cases where individuals passed or attempted to pass counterfeit \$10 bills at businesses in Town. There is no particular suspect at this time and we are asking individuals and businesses to keep an eye out and report any suspicious activity that may lead to the suspects in this case.

Information about how to detect counterfeit money can be found at http://www.secretservice.gov/money_detect.shtml, or call the Edenton Police Department for assistance.

To report any activity related to this investigation please call the Edenton Police Department at 252-482-4444.

Commissioners focus on procedure for appointments

BY REBECCA BUNCH
Staff Writer

How to handle appointments to boards and commissions remains a vexing question for the Chowan County Board of Commissioners.

The county commissioners discussed the issue for the second meeting in a row at their Jan. 20 session but did not reach a consensus.

Currently there are advertised vacancies that need filling on the Chowan County Planning Board, Chowan County Tourism Development Authority, and the Edenton Airport Commission.

Options under consideration include a simple application process currently in use where the commis-

sioners review submitted applications and then vote on the various applicants without conducting individual interviews. The second option would involve an interview in addition to a review of the various applications. The third proposal being considered is to conduct interviews by committee.

"I think part of our decision (involves) whether they would all go before the board of commissioners or just a committee," Commissioner Keith Nixon said. "It may be hard to interview all the people that may come before us."

Nixon asked that a list of all the committees with members that are named by the commissioners be provided to the board.

Town presents service awards

From staff reports

Town of Edenton employees who have worked for the town from 5 to 25 years were honored at the Jan. 13 town council meeting. New employees were also given special recognition. Awards were presented to:

- 5-Years: Percy Brown, public works; Eric Colson, Police; Randy Jordan, Administration; Russ Michael Jr., police; and Henry Sutton, public works
- 10-Years: David Myers, public works; Ronnell Valentine Sr., public works
- 15-Years: Scott Dees, public works; Allen Swanner, fire dept.; and Bobby White, public works
- 20-Years: Lionel Rankins,

Public Works

• 25-Years: William "Billy" Bass Jr., fire dept.; Arnold Brothers, electric dept.; Darlene Carter, Billing and Collections; and Ferrell Pavlich, electric dept.

New Councilman Elton Bond Jr. was recognized as were new employees:

- Volunteer firemen: Joseph Garbach, Matthew Jones, Brandon Smith and Justin Suter
- Police: Brian Callon, Joseph Guinacho, Jeffrey Church, David Nance, John Simpson and Austin Wynn
- Electric dept.: Andrew Forlines
- Public works: Aaron Harris, Kenneth Owens, William Spivey, Clifford Towle Jr., Amy White and William Worters Jr.

SECOND STORE

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occupancy — effectively tying up both existing sites for grocery stores in the community.

Miglorie acknowledged that Food Lion's lack of transparency concerning its future plans has local residents frustrated and looking to local officials for answers.

"It is possible for them

to keep the storefront dark (at Edenton Village) once they move or to sublet the space to a non-grocery related business," he said.

And while officials are doing all they can to get answers, those seem to be in short supply, Miglorie said.

He added that the Partnership wants the shopping centers to be successful.

"We want Terry (Reeves, owner of Chowan Crossing) to be successful," Miglorie said. "We'd like to

see every storefront filled." Councilman Steve Biggs, who works in Bertie County in economic development, agreed.

"I don't want anybody to get the idea that I'm upset with Terry," he said. "My anger is with Food Lion for handicapping our citizens."

Complaints in recent days have included talk about a shortage of materials on the shelves at Food Lion and allegations

that the store is removing national brands from its inventory at the Edenton store and replacing them with Food Lion store brands.

Biggs thanked Miglorie for his diligence in looking at other possibilities to bring the impasse between Food Lion and the community to an end.

"I thank you for looking for an alternative site," Biggs said, noting that Piggy Wiggly had expressed inter-

est in the Farmer's Foods site before a deal was made by Food Lion to relocate there.

"They couldn't even get their foot in the door," he said.

Prior to the start of Miglorie's presentation Mayor Roland Vaughan noted that County Manager Kevin Howard and Chowan Board of Commissioners Chairman Jeff Smith were seated in the audience to listen to the update.

"We invited (them) to show the concerted effort that's being made by local officials (to deal with the lack of a second grocery store here)," Vaughan said. "We all are doing everything within our capability (to deal with the situation)."

Vaughan said that the town is also looking into whether there are legal options that could be exercised to make sure such a situation does not reoccur in the future.

RESIDENTS

Continued from 1A

committed to being a strong partner and to continuing to offer a great shopping experience for our customers with low prices."

Baker said she and White want to get Food Lion's attention.

"What else can we do?" Baker asked. "And I don't want to sit there and do

nothing while they bully everybody."

"This is an outlet for people to be heard," White said, referring to the Facebook page.

The longevity and effect of this boycott movement remains to be seen. But an important episode in the community's history involved a tea boycott by Penelope Barker and 50 other women beginning in October 1774, a movement

that came to be known as the Edenton Tea Party. The community commemorated the 240th anniversary of the Edenton Tea Party this past November.

That historic episode is often described as one of the first instances of organized political activity by women in the American colonies.

In this modern circumstance, one of the main issues for organizers is a wish for transparency.

"Food Lion needs to be open with us," White said. "We're trying to put pressure on them — in our own way — to do that."

"People need to be heard about this," Baker said.

White said she "don't want their page to be a town- or county-bashing page."

Baker said eventually there will be a second grocery store in Edenton because the demand is there.

White said the retail leak-

age in the grocery market — already high — could increase exponentially.

White said they invite people to join their page but don't want anyone to join the page who doesn't want to be there.

Every family has to do what they need to do, Baker said. Some might not be able to drive out of town to shop, for instance, she said.

They acknowledged that "boycott" might not even be

the right word. Mostly they want to give people a voice.


But they don't want Food Lion to be a bully, they insisted.

"Don't hold us hostage to one grocery store," White said.

Baker and White pointed out they have nothing at all against the employees of the Food Lion store.

"They're doing the best they can in a difficult situation," Baker said.

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